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Religious life Prophecy and Mystics

Roma 2020

Introduction

Presentation of the retreat

Main characters in a retreat:

- God the Father is with us with his plan
- The Son will be the centre of all our talks
- The Holy Spirit will be there to guide us, all the way through
- Mary is the model we have to follow
- Don Orione is our inspirer and whose charism we will discuss
- The devil will be there to disturb us and make sure we gain as less as possible, especially when we feel the desire to become holy. He will tell you: "That's not for you, that's too much, Later, I told you, there are other important things, what is going on in my community (school) now, etc,"
- The preacher, me, trying to challenge you with inputs and willing to guide you in any doubts or decisions in spite of being weak in the language and boring.
- You with all your desires, curiosity, worries, fears, lack of trust etc.
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I suggest you make the experience of the disciples of Emmaus. "*Did not our heart burn of desire while he was talking to us on the road?*" Pay attention to these motions of the Spirit, treasure them, pray them and based on them, plan our daily life at home so that as soon as you go home you can transform them into practical love otherwise they will soon disappear. After all, if they would have not invited Jesus into their house they would have not recognised him.

Let us have a look at our life. We work, work a lot, and work well. Often, we are tired and maybe, sometimes, we do not find appreciation in what we do. When we are successful, people are

with us, but when we fail, all abandon us. All of us may have experienced moments of emptiness, disillusion, and may have questioned the meaning of all our work. These situations remind us of the need for clarifying the reasons for our being here, of our vocation. We live in a society so complex that most of the people have confusion in their mind, and look at us to have some clear indications, but: do we have clear ideas and directions to give?

Often, our young brothers come out of formation with good preparation about prayer, community life, etc. but have no experience of the apostolate, except those few moments, spent for it during the novitiate. They arrive in our communities full of enthusiasm, they start working hard. Thanks God, the tirocinium is only for two years, and then they go for theology. They are now more independent, think they know everything (they learned it all during tirocinium), they easily criticize the decisions of superiors but somehow they manage to get through those four years. They come back to the communities and they have also so much of knowledge learned at school. They plunge, once again, into work, they learn about social problems but they become progressively cold in the spiritual life, especially in the personal one. Then they fall into crisis and start doubting about the validity of what they have learned during novitiate or theology, they are a bit nostalgic of those good days, they doubt the real utility of what they are doing.

We must have clear ideas and principles in ourselves if we want to guide others well.

St Paul, in 1 Cor. 13:12, has an interesting sentence: "*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*."

So what is to be done in order to be successful in our vocation, in our being religious, in being Sons of Divine Providence?

During these days we will reflect on the twofold aspect of religious life: to be mystics and to be prophets. John Paul II in the document Vita Consecrata says clearly: "*The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels the characteristic features of Jesus — the chaste, poor and obedient one — are made constantly "visible" in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.*

In every age, there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an "undivided" heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters. In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so have contributed to the renewal of society" (VC1).

CL is deeply rooted in the example and teachings of Christ. We will have Christ as the main object of our reflection all through the retreat. We are here for him, not for ourselves.

It is a gift of God to his Church. It is not something we do or something for ourselves. We are the depositories of a gift of God to the Church, we have to protect it, care for it, not spoil it.

The purpose of the gift is to make visible the feature of Christ and this especially by living the three vows. We are not religious in order to teach the poor, or to give them medicines, or a job, or a house, etc. We are religious so the poor may come to know,

through our life and apostolate, the image of Christ the Saviour, the teacher, the healer etc.
We devote ourselves to him with an undivided heart. So nothing can come between us and Christ. The apostolate is the way to get closer to Christ. If it becomes in any way an obstacle then we are totally wrong in what we do.
A mystic is a person that realizes that whatever he hears, sees, or that happens to him, it comes from God, and is for Him.

DAY 1

The Christ-centred vision of the world by Don Orione and St. Paul.

We all know well that a good education comes from the mixture between a good character and a whole set of situations that, the environment in which we grow, present; all these must be controlled and guided by good people who can direct us.
How this all applied to Don Orione?

The social and political environment.

Luigi was born in a countryside village of northern Italy at the end of XIX century.
This, translated into facts means:

- The environment of his family was one of deep religious belief and devotion from the mother side and a normally cold or at least hidden devotion from the father side. Religion was something for women, not for men.
- Religion was lived by basic devotions and sacraments, with very little catechesis and even less pastoral activities.
- The political situation of Italy, especially in that region, was one of rampaging liberalism and opposite to it the socialism, rich and powerful people against the poor. Both parties agreed only on one aspect: the anticlericalism, meaning that the Church was the common enemy because was the only structure still able to control a great part of the population.
- Priests and Bishops were normally concentrating on sacraments, though there were a few who had started some social involvement with charity activities and social ideas. Among them was Mons. Igino Bandi, who was the

Bishop of Tortona at the time in which Luigi entered the seminary.

- People in the countryside were generically poor and living a very simple life.

Luigi grew with all these influences. From his family, he learned how to work hard; From his mother and his parish priest he learned the importance of God; he knew poverty, knew what it means to be under a landlord, knew the hard life of farmers since his mother would get up early in the morning to go to glean, but knew also how hard manual work is since he himself worked for a year or so in his father's company to pave roads; from the Franciscans, he learned the poverty as a virtue and how to go to beg; from Don Bosco, he learned the love for the Church and the pastoral for the youth; from Cottolengo he learned the trust in Providence and the care for the disabled; from the diocesan seminary he learned how often among the clergy comfortable and lazy life was present and how this would affect the efficacy of their work.

He was an intelligent young person, willing to learn and also to do something to change the world.

The plan he developed in his mind took shape little by little and continued to grow until the last day of his life, though we can say that it had already reached a clear shape by the time he became a priest.

When mons. Bandi had asked him to say clearly what was the plan of the new congregation he had founded he expressed himself in this way. Since the beginning, God has made a plan for the salvation of the world, salvation which has to reach all creatures. This plan, conceived from the beginning of time, had his highest moment with the Incarnation of Christ. Only in Christ, we may find salvation, who, on his side, founded the Church to guaranty that his work of redemption would extend until the end

of times. Since many people still do not get benefited from this divine graces because of many social problems, Don Orione wanted to be part of this great plan of Providence giving his small contribution, he and his Little work of Divine Providence. The way chosen for his work is to bring back all creation to Christ (Instaurare Omnia in Christo), by bringing everyone to the Church who is the only structure at present, who can guaranty that the path chosen is the right one.

At this point, we have to remember that this was the period in which many priests had fallen into the ideology of modernism, spreading a doctrine which would bring confusion to people, rather than faith; but this is also the time in which was celebrated the Vatican I Council who had defined the dogma of infallibility of the Pope. Because of the influence of the political issues and the bad example of some clerics, many people in Italy had started leaving the Church and disregarding the faith. These facts explain his attachment to the Pope and, at the same time, his effort to regain lapse priests to the Church. How should he give his contribution to the plan of God? How would his struggle to bring people to the Church be effective? Through charity, because "*only charity will save the world*".

In seeing this programme, Bishop Bandi, who was a pragmatic person, was afraid that things could be too generic with the risk of dispersion or spinning out of control, so he asked him to specify better what he would do. Don Orione underlined: if the aim is to do a work rather than another, then it would be possible to specify, but if the aim is to bring everything to Christ, then all the works may be needed; in fact, he added a long list of activities which practically excluded no field of work.

This gap of vision between Don Orione and Bishop Bandi went on for a few years until the death of the latter. Bishop kept on swinging between trust and fear and the climax was reached

when he ordered don Orione to close all activities, except the farming schools, and to pass the leadership of the new congregation onto the hands of Don Albera. The solution came when all his followers (Sterpi, Goggi, etc.) opposed the decision of bishop Bandi and said clearly that they would never work under anyone else but Don Orione. Don Orione, on his side, went to see the bishop, submitted his resignation letter in silence. When asked by Monsignor Bandi what he was thinking about, he simply answered: "Since you ordered me to tell, let me say that in conscience your excellency tomorrow should not celebrate the Mass".

From the overview of this small presentation of the spirituality of Don Orione, we can clearly see that it is based principally on the doctrine of Saint Paul, a writer very dear to him, whose letters he had studied well during the time of his theological preparation to the priesthood. We have to remember that Orione started his social work during the years of seminary, he opened the first Oratory at the end of his second year of theology and when he was ordained a priest he had already a college of his own with almost one hundred seminarians.

I want now to present for your reflections some passages from the letters of Saint Paul, which surely had a big influence on the spirituality of young Luigi Orione.

1. The first one must, of course, be the one that became his motto: "*Restore all things in Christ*" (Eph. 1,10).
2. Another sentence which he would often repeat was: "*For the love of Christ urges us on*".
3. The theology of the charisms and that of charity comes from the first letter to the Corinthians chapters 12 and 13.
4. His analysis of the situation of the world comes from the letter to the Romans in chapter 8.

5. The style of his life comes from the theology of the Kenosis and the humility of Christ as expressed in Phil. 2.
6. Many are the passages which helped him to build up his vision of the Cross. Let us recall a few of them. Col. 1,24. "*I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church*". Gal. 2,20. "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*." 2 Cor. 4,8-10. "*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.*" Phil. 1,21. "*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain*." Col. 3,1-3. "*So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.*" (Phil 3:7-9)

To these, we can add the expression of Jesus when, from the cross, he said: "I thirst", passage very well explained by Mother Teresa as the motto for her congregation, but before her, well commented also by Don Orione in the famous passage "Anime Anime".

" The 'Instaurare Omnia in Christo'", says don Orione*, "which was the cry St. Paul, the Apostle - and is the programme of our Congregation -, we must apply it first to ourselves; first renew ourselves in Christ, in order then to renew others, We will not renew others in Christ if we have not renewed ourselves in Christ, in His holy love, and with His holy grace, which will surely not be lacking "* (Letters II. Christmas 1934)

This ideal, Don Orione had it clear since the beginning. There is one message he sent, while still a student and not yet founder (1892?) to his best friend:

My dearest friend in J.C.
Praised be Jesus Christ!
After six months of struggle, Jesus has won and triumphs over my heart.
As a dear friend, I am giving you such a piece of news, that your soul may be filled with consolation.
I am no longer of the world.
Today - May 21 - I abandoned him to embrace the Cross of Jesus Christ and follow him wherever he goes.
Nonetheless, my body will still be for the fun of the world, until our Lord will like to take it elsewhere.
Give thanks to His Divine Majesty with me, and ask Him to set me on fire for charity and of consent to his wishes.
Farewell, world, farewell, parish, ... farewell, country, relatives, goodbye! Goodbye, past, my freedom, my will or my possessions, goodbye and goodbye! O world, o flesh, o devil, I repudiate and

abandon you by virtue of the Holy Spirit, I give you a kick and I renounce you to follow Jesus Christ ... and I leave you forever in the name and to the glory of my Lord. Goodbye! Pray for me a sinner.
Jesus is alive! Jesus triumphs!
A poor servant of Jesus Christ.
*bro. Maria Luigi of Jesus, of the souls and of the Pope. (*V057T065)

He had just come from the experience of Turin, he had lived with Don Bosco and seen the work of Cottolengo, but he somehow felt he should do something else than just being one the followers of these two saints. So he had now landed at the diocesan seminary full of enthusiasm and plans but had discovered how different that situation was, compared to the community of Valdocco. Many of his companions lacked piety, spirit of sacrifice, desire of poverty, and many lacked also the desire to get involved in social activities to rescue people to the Church. Often it seemed to him that some of them had come to the seminary to run away from the hard life of their family and search a place of power and comfort. Would he become like them? If not, would he accept to be made fun of or be rejected? Of course, he had some good superiors and also good companions, some of whom, eventually, joined him in the new congregation.
The union with God and the capacity to surrender everything to Him, was done through prayer but also through conforming himself to Christ, which is more than just follow Him; it means to become one with him, it means to say with St. Paul: *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2.20).* Making a life of sacrifices and accepting all the controversies was his way of purification, to make sure that the plan was not his, but the one of God. Here we can use another passage of St. Paul

when he says: "*make your own the sentiments of Christ"* and the theology of the divine Kenosis of Christ who lowered himself to become like the least.

This union with Christ and the desire to become like Him contributed to developing in him the strong spirituality of the cross. *"I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." (Col 1:24).*

From the very beginning, the cross of Christ takes a central place in the life of Don Orione. He understands that the work he has just started is not going to be an easy one, not much for the work in itself as much because of the opposition he will find from people, especially people from the Church.

Near the Cathedral of Tortona, there is a small chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross. He used that as a place where to gather his boys after the Bishop denied him the use of his garden. In that chapel, he had also some mystical experience and I think we may place in this chapel the experience he refers to when he says: *"Our Congregation was born in a Good Friday at the feet of the Cross and will flourish as long as it remains at the feet of the Cross".*

For personal work

- Who is at the center of my personal spirituality?
- Which image of Jesus is dearest to me (Good Shepherd, the miracles maker, the crucified, the risen, the Sacred heart)?
- How much does this image affect my life and my apostolate?

Holy Mass: “I should lose nothing of all that he has given me” (John 6, 35-40)

From the Gospel of John

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

How great is the God of Jesus! How different it is from the bad copy that we sometimes make of Him! Jesus, in an intense and dramatic moment of his ministry, definitely reveals the true face of God, while trying to convince the crowd to seek God not for the bread that only nourishes the body but for what fills the heart. He reveals a God who does not have anything to do with the aseptic and bored supreme being who scrutinizes the destinies of the world from above but who is a very tender and discreet Father who has only one desire: that his children may have the fullness of life, the eternal life. Eternal life is the life of the Eternal, the life of God that gives our small lives dimensions and breath of immortality. The crowd seeks God to have benefits, protection, help. They had followed Jesus with the illusion that

with Him no problems would anymore mess up their life, they would have food and richness in plenty. Jesus, on the other hand, proposes to look up to see that the God who gave manna to the people of Israel has actually given them much more: the freedom to be children, the absolute dignity of being humans.
Something similar had happened also to the Samaritan woman. She had asked Jesus to give her the living water he had promised and Jesus answered making her reflect how empty was her daily life, how far from the happiness she was.
And what about us? Every day the Lord offers us the bread of life of his body and the living water which is his word because he doesn't want any of us to be lost, and yet so often we look only for bread and water from the earth to fill our bellies. There is another passage of the Gospel that we should always keep in mind while doing apostolate: "Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and all the things shall be added unto you". (Mt. 6,33). So many people nowadays do not know anymore what they are in need of, they have lost the taste for spiritual things, they feel the emptiness inside but they do not know why. We meet them because very often they come to our institutions: what do we offer them? It is easy to fall in the temptation of being satisfied by only caring for the material needs and ignore the spiritual ones. We usually use as justification for our negligence, the respect of the conscience of the others.

Thirst for souls, the way Don Orione and Mother Teresa wanted to quench the thirst of Christ on the cross

This morning I finished the sermon at Mass talking about the people who come to our institutions and need from us something more than just material help. Without uttering a word they tell us: "I am thirsty". Mother Teresa once told that the beginning of her vocation or better the reason for her asking to leave the beautiful convent where she was teaching and set to the slums, was because she met a poor person who asked her some money, bringing as a reason for his request: "I am thirsty". She didn't have money to give and felt very disturbed by the situation. Reflecting on that meeting she realized that the one speaking was not just any person but Jesus himself who from the Cross was expressing his thirst for souls, the unquenchable desire to save everyone, starting from that poor person. Interestingly enough, about 20 years before Mother Teresa had that experience, Don Orione wrote this beautiful page:

I feel nothing but an infinite, a divine symphony of spirits palpitating around the cross, and the cross exudes, drop by drop, across the centuries, the divine blood spilled for every human soul.

Christ cries out from the Cross 'I am thirsty'. It is a terrible sultry cry, not of the flesh, but the cry of thirst for souls, and it is for this thirst for our souls that Christ died.

I can see nothing but heaven, a truly divine heaven, because it is the heaven of salvation and a true peace: I can see nothing but a kingdom of God, the kingdom of charity and pardon, where the whole crowd of peoples is the inheritance of Christ and the kingdom of Christ."

The engine of Don Orione's work, or better, the source of his strength was the knowledge of the love of Christ for him and for all. How many times we find in his letters the expression: "because *the love of Christ urges us on*". His heart was so full of God's love that his life had no sense but working to make all the desires of Christ be fulfilled.
Many times we find also comments to the Hymn of charity from the 1st letter to the Corinthians. The most famous one is the comment which he broadcasted by radio from Argentina in March 1936.

"We are apostles of charity, let us keep our passions in check, let us rejoice in other people's well-being as we do in our own. This is how it will be in Heaven, just as Dante expresses it in his sublime poetry. We are apostles of charity, of pure love, of lofty and universal love. Let us cause charity to reign with meekness of heart, by bearing with one another, by helping each other, by offering each other our hand so as to walk together. Let us generously sow, in our footsteps, works of goodness and of love. Let us dry the tears of those who cry". (The hymn of Charity in Letters II 329)
Charity had become for him the way of imitating Christ but also of feeling united with him. He could not bear that so many people were getting lost just because they never experienced the love of God, hence all his actions and works.

"The one who has Charity, rather, wants to live for others and consume himself for others in the tenderest love of Jesus Crucified and wants nothing other than to make everyone blessed in God. "Whoever has a spark of true Charity, will realise the hollowness of all earthly things!"

… We are living in an age that is full of frigidity and death in the life of the spirit. Closed up in ourselves we see nothing but pleasures, vanity, and the life of this world, nothing more. What will give life to this generation, dead to the life of God, if it is not the breath of the love of Jesus Christ? The face of the earth is renewed with the warmth of Spring, but the moral world will only have new life through the warmth of charity.
We must, therefore, ask God, not for a spark of Charity as the "Imitation of Christ" says, but for a furnace of Charity to set us on fire and to renew the cold and frigid world, with the help and grace that the Lord will give us.
We will have a great Catholic renewal if we have a great charity. We must, however, begin to exercise it among ourselves today and to cultivate it in the heart of our Institutions, which must be true communities of charity. "No-one can give what he does not have." We shall not be able to give the living flames, the fire and light of Charity, to souls if we are not already on fire, very much on fire.
Charity must be our impetus, our ardour and our life".
(letter to Fr. Pensa, 2nd of May 1920. In Letters I p. 177 ss.)

He, somehow, became obsessed with his need for being the bearer of God's love for all. From there his famous lemma: *"Do good always, good to all, evil to none".* In a message to his confrères, seminarians, friends and benefactors for Christmas, he wrote:

*"What is He (*Jesus from the crib) *saying to us? Charity! Charity! Charity! Let us open our hearts wider to the most tender of affections, and throw ourselves in adoration at the feet of Jesus; may our lives burn with the flames of His love, since His love is gentle and divine, and it is life; it is life, and the fruit of His charity*

is peace, and in fact is the beauty of peace itself: in the beauty of peace!

… We want to change ourselves, we want to become good Religious, true Religious, holy Religious, according to the wish of Your heart. We want to become humble, simple like the shepherds, docile to You and to Your Church, like their little lambs, we want to love You, love You so much, consume ourselves with love for You and for souls, oh Jesus! My Jesus, give us Charity, remove everything else! Oh Jesus, come! Be mystically reborn in us and in our little Congregation with Your holy love; we just want to live through Your charity and in Your charity!"

(Christmas 1934 in Letters II 139 ss.)

How far is this way of thinking from that of many people who search, in the apostolate, for personal fulfilment and expect from it, honour and gratitude!

The desire to serve the poor is common to many of the saints, maybe even the majority of them. So what makes Don Orione so special, what is his peculiarity? His way of working for it.

He understood that no matter what work he would have started, that would soon collapse if not firmly inserted in something big and enduring. God can make use of thousands of ways and people to save us, even the most unusual, but Jesus has already created a safe way for all, one that surely will endure forever since He created it, and that is the Church. For Don Orione to make people love the Church was the easiest and safest way to bring them to Christ. The "Instaurare Omnia in Christo" became for him an "Instaurare Omnia in Ecclesia".

While still a student, Orione had the chance to speak at an official diocesan meeting and he chose, as a topic, "The ……. Of the Church in Christ". His enthusiastic and fiery way of speaking struck Monsignor Bandi who gave him the formal permission to preach in all churches of the diocese in spite of the fact that he

was just a student. That was something unthinkable for that time.

For personal work

- Can I see Christ present in others?
- Can I see God's will when things are not going well?
- Do I feel the need to do something to help those in need (even when I can't really do much)?

DAY 2

Protagonism versus humility; arrivism versus trust in Providence; selfishness versus universal brotherhood

"Go away from me Satan because you do not think in God's way but according to the world"

The sentence we just read is one of the central points of the life of Jesus and of the theology of the synoptic gospels. Let us take it in its context: Mt 15:22 – 18:5 and Lk 9 which are parallel and in both cases represent a turning point in the life of Jesus. After having preached and made miracles Jesus now tests the maturity of his disciples by sending them for a short mission (Lk 9:1-6). Then he performs one of the greatest miracles: the multiplication of bread (9:10-17); Until now Jesus has been making a lot of miracles, has been preaching to the crowds and seemed to be successful. Now he is alone with the disciples. The crowds left him. He asks the opinion of his disciples about his identity. He poses a double question: "What do people say – what do you say", that creates a division between the group of the disciples and the rest of people. We are at the beginning of a new family; the family of the real believers, based on the profession of faith of Peter. They are the ones who really believe in Jesus, while people think he is only a prophet. From now on he will concentrate only on them, the talks will be addressed mainly to them and, with them, he starts his journey towards Jerusalem. What I just said sounds nice but not everything goes so smooth (9:18-29). As soon as Jesus foretells his passion (9:21-27) Peter shows how

weak his faith can be. In spite of all his experience in being with Jesus, in spite of having declared him the Son of the living God, Peter rejects clearly the perspective of Jesus' death (Mt 16:13-28). Maybe his answer is dictated by the fear of losing Jesus but it shows also that the idea of the Messiah as a political or powerful leader is still deeply rooted in them all. Straight after this episode, He goes on mount Tabor for the Transfiguration where the three apostles (Peter, James and John) hear from Moses and Elijah about the passion of Christ (9:28-36); he predicts once again his passion and the disciples do not understand but are afraid to ask for explanations (9:44-45); while they were speaking about their greatness, He speaks about real greatness and service (9:46-48); even here, after a few lines, while on the journey to Jerusalem, John and James ask Jesus' permission to send fire from heaven to destroy a village that refused to welcome them. Finally, he set out decisively to Jerusalem (9:51-56).

The message is clear: it is not enough to be religious (disciples or even apostles), it is not enough to proclaim the divinity of Jesus; still we can be serving Satan if we do not accept the reality of the cross.

Satan: The words used by Jesus to address Peter remind us of the third temptation of Jesus in the Desert which we will see later. All through his life, Jesus had to face this temptation of accepting human power, human way of success. Jesus is in a completely different position, he has chosen the way of humility, service, weakness; the way of the Beatitudes, and the way of love, which will ultimately bring him to the cross.

Every time we make choices in the name of human success or human power, every time that for the sake of getting results, we go for easy solutions, which come from compromises with sin, we follow the way of the devil, not the way of God. Later, in our

retreat, we will speak about the apostolate. The primary purpose of our works is the evangelisation which does not mean conversion but means to make everybody know the "euangellion" the good news of God's love for them. That means to be prophets in our work. If we aim at a human success we, not only do not evangelize but often we scandalize people, chase them away from the Church. The best hospital or school with all the possible modern equipment etc. but where one cannot feel the love of God, is the perfect work of Satan.

Pope Francis has very strong words on this regard:

"93. Spiritual worldliness, which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love for the Church, consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being. It is what the Lord reprimanded the Pharisees for: "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (Jn 5:44). It is a subtle way of seeking one's "own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). It takes on many forms, depending on the kinds of persons and groups into which it seeps. Since it is based on carefully cultivated appearances, it is not always linked to outward sin; from without, everything appears as it should be. But if it were to seep into the Church, "it would be infinitely more disastrous than any other worldliness which is simply moral"

94. This worldliness can be fuelled in two deeply interrelated ways. One is the attraction of Gnosticism, a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is the self-absorbed Promethean neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain

rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past. A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others. These are manifestations of an anthropocentric immanentism. It is impossible to think that a genuine evangelizing thrust could emerge from these adulterated forms of Christianity.

...

97. Those who have fallen into this worldliness look on from above and afar, they reject the prophecy of their brothers and sisters, they discredit those who raise questions, they constantly point out the mistakes of others and they are obsessed by appearances. Their hearts are open only to the limited horizon of their own immanence and interests, and as a consequence, they neither learn from their sins nor are they genuinely open to forgiveness. This is a tremendous corruption disguised as a good. We need to avoid it by making the Church constantly go out from herself, keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel!"

Let me present some attitudes which are very common in our society and are often present among us religious.

The first is Protagonism. There is nothing wrong with this attitude in itself if it means that we are active in achieving

something we consider very important. What is dangerous with it, is when it makes a relationship with others, difficult. Whenever we are concentrating on achieving something and we meet with people who have different opinions, there is a strong temptation to avoid them or even to fight them. The same happens also when we meet people that through their work or skills may steal our show. On the other side, when we meet somebody who is supportive to us we may feel the temptation to make use of them to confirm our position and ideas even to the point of reducing them to slaves. This double tendency brings us to another wrong attitude that is the one of careerism. By this word, I mean the attitude of setting our personal fulfilment as the only goal of our work. We well know that the only purpose of our apostolate is to serve God and the good of people and that personal fulfilment comes from doing God's will, but if this is clear in our mind, is not so in our heart, where emotions bring us to a completely different direction. When we feel that our welfare is in danger because we have to sacrifice some of our interests in order to achieve what is good for others, then we tend to defend, above all, our own interest and the quest for a comfortable life and personal satisfaction at all costs. Similar situations we experience when we fear of not being appreciated, not being understood; when we have low self-esteem and we have an unconscious need of showing to ourselves how good we are.

Let me use some words from a letter don Orione wrote to the young Biagio Marabotto who was asking to join the congregation. *"And the first duties of those who feel called to a sublime state are to humiliate themselves before the Lord, and be wary of themselves, and to pray very much, especially the to the Most Holy Virgin, - and mortify all his senses, and proceed thus, with the help*

of divine grace, following the advice of the spiritual director by mouth of which God ordinarily speaks to us.
I learned from your first letter that you opened your heart to a good capuchin father, and that he said yes, -- and that makes me think that your calling is indeed from God and that you should follow it generously and soon, because, in the way of holy vocation, the devil must not be given time to put obstacles in the way.
Be careful, however, o my son, that whoever is called by the Lord, must truly bid farewell forever to the life of the world and to secular thoughts, and, attach the tenderest piety and assiduity to the divine service: be more cautious to escape from any shadow of danger and distraction: with total self-denial for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to obey in all things and always and very gladly and very filially to the Holy Mother Church, and to its leader, the Roman Pontiff, vicar in the land of our Lord and sweet Christ visible on earth, (to which our little Congregation is particularly attached), and to the superiors that God will give you in the Congregation, may you deserve from the Lord that you be more and more confirmed with the great gift of vocation, and the help to accomplish it, following our Sweet Lord even in the practice of the holy Evangelical Councils.
You will have noticed that I said to be in such a state, a great grace, according to God.
I said it, because it is certainly not according to the world; while the true religious renounce all interests down here, and only the Lord and his Holy Cross will be the portion of your inheritance."
All through the gospel, we find words from Jesus encouraging us to humility and service: "*He who wants to be the greatest among you must be smallest and the servant of all*".
Humility is not to deny your own capacity and skills, but to recognize that they come from God and He gave them with a purpose: to serve.

We often meet people (and maybe I am one of them) who resort to all possible ways to earn praise, fame, power. This makes us feel a kind of thrill that soon disappears as soon as a difficulty, a criticism or a doubt arise. It is a useless effort that does not bring real results.
The Saints have always taught humility. The lack of humility leads us to the search for the mistakes of others, to criticize and to submit to any compromise in order not to run into the judgment of others. Humility also makes us recognize our true place in society and clearly indicates to us what the priorities are: "*Seek first of all the Kingdom of God and his Justice, all other things will be given to you in addition*" (Mt. 6:33).
There may also be those who outwardly seem humble but in reality, are shy or have little self-confidence, and experience this discomfort inwardly. Although on the practical side there is a huge difference between the two groups of people, the problem is still similar; that is, to seek from others that value that we do not know to give to ourselves.

Saint Paul in his 1st letter to the Corinthians. (1,22-31) writes:
"*And while the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks seek wisdom, we preach Christ crucified, scandal for the Jews, foolishness for the pagans; but for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, we preach Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because what is God's foolishness is wiser than men, and what is God's weakness is stronger than men.*

Consider your calling, brethren: there are not among you many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many nobles. But God has chosen what is foolish in the world to confuse the wise. God has chosen what is weak in the world to confuse the strong. God has chosen what in the world is despicable and despised and

what is nothing to reduce to nothing the things that are so that no man can boast before God. And it is for him that you are in Christ Jesus, who by God's work has become for us wisdom, justice, sanctification and redemption, because, as he is writing: "Those who boast, let them boast in the Lord God"."

Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exultate:*
118. *Humility can only be rooted in the heart through humiliation. Without them, there is no humility or holiness. If you are not able to endure and offer some humiliation, you are not humble and on the path to holiness. The sanctity that God gives to his Church comes through the humiliation of his Son: this is the way. Humiliation leads you to look like Jesus, it is an inescapable part of Christ's imitation: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you may follow in his footsteps" (1 Pt 2.21). He, in turn, manifests the humility of the Father, who humiliates himself to walk with his people, who endures their infidelities and murmurings (cf. Ex 34,6-9; Wis 11,23-12.2; Lk 6.36). For this reason, the Apostles, after their humiliation, were "pleased to have been judged worthy of being abused for the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:41).*

119. *I am not only referring to the violent situations of martyrdom, but to the daily humiliations of those who endure to save their families, or avoid speaking well of themselves and prefer to praise others instead of glorying themselves, they choose the less brilliant assignments, and sometimes even prefer to endure something unjust to offer it to the Lord: "If by doing good, you will patiently endure suffering, this will be welcome before God" (1 Pt 2.20). It is not to walk with head bowed, to speak little or to escape from society. Sometimes, precisely because he is free from self-centredness, someone may have the courage to discuss amiably, to*

demand justice or to defend the weak before the powerful, even if this gives him negative consequences for his image.

120. *I am not saying that humiliation is something pleasant, that would be masochism, but that it is a way to imitate Jesus and grow in union with him. This is not naturally understandable and the world ridicules such a proposal. It is a grace that we need to plead: "Lord, when humiliation comes, help me to feel that I am behind you, following on your way."*

Don Orione replied to the young Biagio Marabotto who was applying to join in the congregation:
But Jesus, our sweet God and Father, is with us, and we have a happy life, for we just need to have Jesus. He will be with you, and he will console you, and you will find more spiritual joy and more contentment and happiness to live of the poverty and humiliation of our Lord, than if you were rich in all the fleeting goods and pleasures of this poor world.
Dear son, making you our own, make sure that you will have to live as a crucified one with your Lord Jesus Christ crucified, for as the De Imitatione Christi says well: vita boni religiosi crux est, - which means in practice that one really follows Jesus, really loves him and one really serves him through the cross.
And this must be the life of the good religious: crucify at the feet of Jesus our freedom, our will, our life, all our senses and feelings, and this with the grace that God always gives to those who pray to him. Still, dear Marabotto, you will have nothing left to hope for in the world, except toils and sufferings and persecutions for the sake of our God and the Pope and souls.
You too always want to live in the presence of the Lord. Dear children, we live humble and small at the foot of the Church, as

children, with full abandonment at the feet of the Bishops, of the Pope who is the Bishop of Bishops, the sweet Christ on earth.

In 1935 Don Orione was in Argentina; he had just accepted a parish in the region of Chaco and went there so see the work. He soon discovered that no priest wanted to work there because of the climate and poverty. He wrote a letter (August 2, 1935) to the seminarians in Italy:

"I need personnel: when I think of you, when I pray for you, I see you all one by one, and I search among you, almost calling you by your names, for you to come to help me to spread the Congregation among these peoples. Here there is a great need for Priests who are full of the love of God and of souls, ready to sacrifice themselves together with Our Lord, to give the life of the Faith or to cause it to increase in many people who do not have it, or who no longer have it. Many people only think of money and are on their way to ruin because they have regard only for earthly things.

We must also prepare ourselves for the mission that has been entrusted to us in Albania.

Come on, my sons, let us get going and work, modelling our lives on the life of Jesus Christ. Let us take courage and boldly - looking to the Lord and asking for help from the Lord – let us advance in Christian and religious virtues and in the love and service of God and of the Church.

We must learn Jesus Christ, as St. Paul said, and walk, walk, walk briskly along the Lord's way. Come on, my sons, you must all be prepared to be apostles - either in Italy or abroad. But it is absolutely necessary for us all to be Apostles of faith, of love for God and for our neighbour, of love for Our Blessed Lady, of love for the Pope and for the Church. Those who do not want to be Apostles, better leave our Congregation: these days the person who is not an

Apostle of Jesus Christ and of the Church is an apostate. Everyone must be an Apostle of charity: everyone in charity, and every one an Apostle of the charity of Jesus Christ."

He expressed again the same ideas on two other occasions:

"Our first Missionaries write that they are few, that they are not enough, and to send others. Dondero is alone ... He writes that he would be happy even to have a seminarian; just to have a little help. The mission is very promising, but I need saints! How many times, lately have I thought of you my dear sons! And I have gone over you one by one, to see whom I could send! I will have to pick out and send one of you with the greatest haste, but I need saints! The fact that you are small in numbers means little to me: you would learn the language immediately... but whoever goes, I need to take holiness with him. Which of you feels ready? My dear little sons, we seek holiness, but immediately: let us not wait any longer: let us not be late! Holiness! The desire for holiness! Everything will come after this... (March 3, 1914) (Letters of Don Orione vol.1)

The congregation has a strong spirit of initiative and activity, ... However, speaking to you with heart in hand, I confess that I cannot defend myself from the painful thought and fear that this boastful activity of the Sons of Divine Providence, has to fail if they are not fertilized and sanctified by true and solid piety. Let us not rest until we have obtained from God the grace to pray and to pray well. Make people pray and pray well. Each house is "Domus orationis" (house of prayer) (July 22, 1924)

For personal work

- Do I often get angry with others?
- What are the moments when I get angry the most? Why?

- How do people involved in my place of apostolate see me (what do they think of me)?

Holy Mass: The call of the 12 Apostles (Mk 3:13-19)

Jesus was about to accomplish the most important fact in the history of humanity: the salvation of the world. He knew that he could not possibly accomplish it in the few years available since he didn't want to do it through a miracle. So he needed a structure, a group that would continue his work beyond the centuries and the civilizations. He created the Church that would become the biggest and most powerful structure ever. As God he could have chosen better times to be incarnated, maybe today's times where technology would have made his job easier and more effective, or at least choose the most powerful empire: Rome, or the most developed culture: the Greek, and instead he chose the smallest and most troubled nation: Israel and Judea.

In Israel, he could have chosen as companions and successors the rich and powerful Sadducees, or the religious Pharisees, or somebody with political connections with the king or with the Romans, and instead, he chose simple people, mostly poor and illiterate, fishermen, tax collectors, etc. They became Apostles and managed to convert the world. They overtook their weaknesses because they knew how important their mission was, but especially they overtook all fears because they understood the meaning of Jesus' words: "*I will be with you till the end of time*", and "*I will send you the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you*". Indeed the Holy Spirit is the one who made all things narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, possible. Even most of our founders were not the brightest people, nor from powerful families. And yet they too did great things only because they allowed the Holy Spirit to work through them.

To form a group strong and successful you need unity among the members, so the best thing to do is to choose people with affinity, same culture, same social group, same political ideas. , he instead mixed up fishermen with countryside people, tax collectors with zealots (terrorists); the quiet Bartholomew, and the angry type Boanerghes (James and John); Emotional people like Peter, cool like Jude, doubtful like Thomas, greedy like Judas. But he managed to make them one: what is the secret of his success? Of course, quarrels were there, jealousies too but these things did not ruin the group.

In a society in which women could go out only if fully covered and accompanied by their husbands, he managed to have some women among the disciples, some of whom had even a doubtful reputation, but that too did not break the group. What is the secret?

The disciples were there for a purpose: Jesus. They were in love with him, they focused on him not on themselves or on the others. If we have a strong ideal to focus on and we consider this ideal the most important thing of all, then everything else becomes secondary and can help. But if we have no ideals or our ideas are different, then clashes are inevitable.

We will speak about “community”. Community is fulfilled if we build it around a strong ideal and that is Christ. If there is no Christ then we become a group and our houses hotels where we live for our convenience, and where we stay as long as it is convenient.

During this Mass we will be invited to exchange a sign of peace, may that sign signify Jesus taking over our relationships, heal our divisions, rid us of our jealousies and pride and bring to our community the peace, not as the world understands it but “His” peace.

Real love shows itself first of all inside the house: community life

Today I would like to start with a question: Is community life simply meant for helping the apostolate or is there something more? The answer seems to be obvious: the community has a value in itself. We all know that, but it is not so when we go to concrete life. Our communities are set up because there is a work to do, a parish to administer, a Cottolengo, a seminary, a school to run, etc. People sent to it are chosen according to their skills: he has titles, he is a good teacher so let us send him to a community where he can be put in charge of a school. Even the timetable is made in a way to favour the work we do. Of course, we need a place where to stay, to pray, to eat and that is the community house. But if in our apostolate we look at the efficiency, we can see that working with others slows down the process, different ideas make the process of decision making more difficult, and often it is impossible to reach a conclusion to our discussions. So many people start acting in a solitary way, while others may fall in the temptation to live in a passive way, accept blindly whatever comes and avoid giving their contribution of ideas and projects.

The apostolate takes a great part of our time and strength.

All this is ok. Nobody wants to deny the importance of apostolate. This topic needs a whole chapter but, if the apostolate becomes the only reason to be in a particular community, what will happen when I become sick, I cannot work anymore: does my presence in the community lose its meaning?

What I want to underline with this talk is that the community is an apostolic tool in itself, which is much more effective than the apostolate done by the single religious.

We read at Mass the passage of St. Mark: "*He called them to stay with him and also to send them*" (Mk: 3,14). The staying with him is not for the mere purpose of training them but is because Jesus chose to do his mission through a family lifestyle. So staying with him is the priority, not the instrument. Jesus built a family and on several occasions, he underlines this family aspect. He didn't build a group or a hostel, or a walking school; he built a family. Everything is different when it is done as a family, and this aspect should be remembered especially by those who are superiors. Take for example prayer. It is different to pray together and to pray as a family. To pray together means that we are in the same room and say the same prayer at the same time, but maybe our hearts do not feel any difference, maybe among us, there is division, coldness. When we pray as a family, even if one is physically missing, he is spiritually there, in his desire but also in the desire of the brothers, they pray for him and also on his behalf.

Jesus taught us: "*When you pray you say: Our Father*". Our is plural so this prayer has full meaning when we pray it as "we" and not as "I". Only Jesus could say "my Father". We can say "Father" only through Jesus, so may say "our" not "my".

Something similar is the work inside the community. Do you remember the parable of the two sons whom the father invites to go and do some work? Mt 21,28. Who among the two was a real member of the family and who was not?

To build a family needs much more than just to be united by blood relation. It needs a spirit of belonging, the capacity of sacrifice, etc. We have many religious who worked well for years with genuine apostolic zeal, but sadly they left the Congregation,

the priesthood and as a consequence, even the apostolate. What was missing was not the joy of the apostolate but the sense of belonging. What they were doing in the apostolate could have been done in any Congregation and even as non-priest. But to be Son of Divine Providence, Salesian, Jesuit, can be achieved only living in the family and building up a sense of belonging. The fact that some left because of a lady is not a true view of the problem. The falling for a woman was not the cause but the consequence of emptiness. Apostolate drains our emotional resources; we cannot keep on giving without receiving and if we do not have a family who supports us, we build a surrogate one.

Family is not a place where everything goes well. We usually encounter problems, misunderstandings, and often there are people who are not mature, who do not know how to deal with love. We have a clear example of it in the parable of the good father and the two sons: Lk 15,11-32 commonly called the parable of the prodigal son. Both sons are very important to their father and the real centre of the story is the comparison of the way of acting of the two sons in front of the love of their father. It strikes me the full freedom given by the father to the youngest, in spite of him knowing what he was going to do and how wrong that was. The son goes and loses sight of the father and of his house. The result can only be a ruin of the inheritance and the need to look for a replacement of the lost joy. The family is where he belongs and cannot be replaced by anything, richness, feasting, etc. He may not have the courage to admit it but he feels empty inside. Away from the family, he will always be out of place. Even if he would have been successful in his business, there would always be something missing.

The conversion comes when he acknowledges that he made a mistake and ruined himself, he alienated himself from what he really wanted.

But to be alienated from the family spirit does not mean necessarily that somebody must run away. We have the eldest son, who has been serving, obeying and working. From the answer he gives to the father, who is inviting him inside to celebrate, we understand that he too did not feel the belonging. None of the two is mature, but the father conquers them both with his patience and acceptance. The attitude of the father is understandable only if we look at him as the God of compassion well described in Hos 1-3 and Hos 11,8: a God who has chosen a wife who is a prostitute and keeps on running away from him, a God who is so much in love that always takes her back and continues to love her; a Father who waits patiently because he knows that the son will eventually come back.

We need to live in a community that is not just one of the features of our life. Community is something that has a great mystical and prophetic aspect.

The mystic is described well in 1 Cor 12:12. We are the mystical body of Christ. We are just part of this body and we cannot function if separated from it. It is true that the only vital part is the head but a body without a leg or a hand, though alive, will always be a lame or a handicapped body. This is what Jesus meant when he said: "*When two or three are united in my name I will be there*". With that sentence, Jesus was not referring only to prayer. We are united in his name in any activity we do in the community because religious communities are by nature built in the name of Jesus. So, to act as a family is to make Christ present among us. Another consideration connected to this is that if it is true that we can see Jesus present in everyone, how much more we should be able to see Jesus present in our brothers in the community.

Another mystic point is found in the purpose of the community life itself. The community life is the image on earth of the

communion existing among the persons in the Trinity, a communion that can only be described through pure love. A lover wants, by nature, to be united, as much as possible, with the loved one. In this case, when we build a community based on love (and there would be no other reason for remaining united), we share in the life of the Trinity itself. Practically speaking, when I love you, I make the Trinity dwelling among us, and when I try to be united with God there is no other choice but to love those around me.

Which is the prophetic aspect? Prophetic means "that speaks for (about)". Our community life must be an attitude that gives a clear message of what it signifies. We have seen in the mystical aspect that the meaning of the community is to be the body of Christ and to signify the Trinity. These two aspects have to be clearly seen in our communities.

This is a very important point for today's society. Every day we face situations of broken families, groups where people are exploited and their needs neglected in the name of progress, selfishness, and greed; Psychologists speak of the need for self-affirmation, but this is often done through rejecting rules, moral values, etc.

We will see that our answer to these problems comes from the three vows, but these vows, if not lived in a community environment could lose most of their prophetic power. A person who does not get married and dedicate himself to work for the others could well be a philanthropist with some problems preventing him to marry. But if chastity is lived in a community based on love, on a real relationship, as a choice made by all and not by one only, then it becomes a sign of something more valuable. A person who gives up his possessions could be a crazy man or someone who does not like those particular items, after all, we have examples of tramps who live in the street and could

have had a good life, a job and a career. Giving up these things was a choice done in the name of freedom but not exactly a spiritual one and not an answer to the problem of poverty. But when it is a whole community who makes those radical choices then it is more credible.

Jesus says: "*From this, they will recognize you: if you love one another*" (Jn 13:35).

Even apostolate becomes more meaningful when lived in a community way (which does not mean that everybody is there to work in the same place). In Italy, we have many institutions. We use to have many religious working in each one of them. Now due to the crisis of vocations, we gathered the religious who were in nearby houses in one community and from there the confreres handle the works. So one community can now be in charge of three or four activities and each activity, practically, will see one religious working. It is important then that the religious work in a community-minded way. What is not seen has to be felt in the way he works.

After all, apostolate is to make people experience the love of God and what love God has which is not a sharing of the community of love which is the Trinity? The first apostolate in the history of salvation is that God took pity on our situation and sent his only Son among us to rescue us. We send one of our confreres to do a particular job, it has to be the fruit of our love which overflows to benefit the others. So apostolate is always a mandate of the community.

Some passages from a letter of Don Orione to the missionaries in the Holy Land, 15/11/1922

"I will write to him soon, and you can observe how he receives my letter.

And allow me to encourage and comfort you in patience, as I maintain that patience is the greatest gift of a wise Superior. Speak

with frankness and loyalty, speak with brotherly and priestly love more than with the seriousness of a superior. Try all methods, and be ready to tolerate a few faults, a few disadvantages with unlimited patience, my dear Don Adaglio, with unlimited patience.
The more you advance in charity, the more you will patiently accept defects, the faults of your personnel - many times, you see, they do not do something because they really cannot: they go to the positive, because they are not able to raise themselves to the comparative; they go to 4 or else to 6, because they cannot get up to 5 or to 7; we must then accept that and take what little they can give - you will more readily win their hearts and lead them where you want or, at least, where you see that they can reach. And then you must understand them, and not seek the impossible, nor make them go on any further. You must be discreet; this is why discretion and prudence are necessary gifts, of prime necessity for a Superior. And then changes will come all the more quickly if it is a question of faults rather than impossibility or moral incapacity.
But do not stop exhorting incessantly in the Lord: do not cease to point out, with the freedom of a brother and of a priest, their omissions, deficiencies and faults; and keep on calling them to their duty; and all for the love of God, without any harshness, but calmly, firmly, using strength if necessary, serenely and always consistently wise. And try always to end on a word that will open their hearts, rather than close them up.
…
Let us do everything for the love and in the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and everything will become easy, light, sweet, pleasant: without the love of God everything becomes cold and laboured and burdensome; but with the love of Jesus Christ and through the love of Jesus Christ everything becomes most sweet and desirable, and even the Cross becomes a treasure and a benefit without which we

cannot live, and a means through which death becomes the life and the happiness of the soul!
How beautiful it is to have a little bit of love for the Lord! And how beautiful it is also to love, comfort, excuse, and help each other in the fraternal love that comes from Our Lord, who is our God and also our Brother, "the First Born" of the Most Blessed Mary, since we are the second born".

How can we be prophets in our community life? Let us look again at Jesus.

- When He came to earth he chose to do it through a family and remained in the family for the longest part of his life, subjected to the rules and regulations of family life. He stayed hidden in his family for almost thirty years and worked for his mission for about three years.
- As soon as he started his apostolate he formed a group, a new family with whom he shared his work and we know that he did not choose the best people for it.
- He trained them, cared for them, shared light moments with them as in Lk 9:10, trusted in them and sent them (two by two) to the mission, he served them like when he washed their feet (Jn 13); he defended them like in the garden of Gethsemane when the soldiers wanted to arrest them as well (Jn 18:8).
- He prayed for them and for their unity (Jn 17:20-23)
- He accepted their shortcomings, their lack of understanding as we see in many of their questions, their desire of power as for the request of the mother of James and John, the frequent change of mood of Peter, the betrayal of Judah, their running away after his arrest, the incredulity of Thomas. All this was part of making them ready for the mission he had prepared for them.

- Particularly important is the episode of the washing of the feet. John describes it in a very solemn way with a big introduction. After washing the feet he commands them to do the same. Family can be built only by mutual service and love. Then he tells that there is no greater love than the one who dies for his friends. Finally, he tells that from now on he calls them only friends. Judas was among those to whom he washed the feet and he had just now gone out.

For personal work:

What are the challenges to our community life?

- Often the apostolate becomes a way of escaping from the community life. Relationships with people outside are easier than those with people inside. We see it when we monitor the desire we have to go out or to come back; how much do we speak about our community with our outside friends and what do we say about it? Do I like to gossip with my outside friends about the wrongs in my community?
- The emptiness and discomfort inside are covered by the busy activity outside. How easily we accept commitments and activities in moments in which we should instead come back home where the community is having common prayers, meals, meetings recreations, etc.
- How much do we speak to our brothers about our activities, and how much help we ask from them? Are we willing to share our activities with them?
- Somebody may be tempted to live in the community in a passive way, without joy or creativity, without any proposal, worried to disturb the others with his own ideas. This is also wrong because the community grows through the contribution of all. Am I one of those? What can I do to help my community to be a better answer to the plan of God?

- Do I understand the value of living as a family?
- Do I thank the Lord for my community? What do I have to thank for in a special way?
- Is there anything that I feel guilty of towards my community? How can I remedy it?

Here are some passages from St. Paul on how to improve our community life:

1 Cor 13, 1-7
Fil 2, 1-5
Col 3, 12-15
Ef 4, 1-13
2 Tim 4,1

DAY 3

The way to fight the mentality of this world and his three temptations: The Desert

Why a meditation about the desert? Because Jesus himself started from there. But what is the desert?
Desert is the place where we purify ourselves in order to meet God.
In the OT we have the 40 years in the desert of the people of Israel, the 40 days of Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:27), the 40 days of Elijah in the desert on his way to Mount Horeb to meet the Lord (1 Kg 19:4-8). In the rabbinic stories, we have 40 days of fasting of Abraham on his way to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac, sustained only by the words of encouragement from an angel.
In the book of the prophet Hosea God speaks about how unfaithful Israel has been, like a prostitute, but then he comments: *"Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her."* (2:16).
The experience of the people of Israel in the book of Exodus is an experience of a relationship with God and dependence on Him. Very often they complain and rebel but God guides them with patience and constancy. While they are there they have nothing else to worry about, as soon as they get settled in the Promised Land they get into business and look only at material things, and start forgetting about God.
Moses and Elijah went to the desert in order to be separated from people: Moses escaping from Egypt after killing the officer, Elijah escaping from the queen after slaughtering the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Both will meet God in the

desert and both will go back to their renewed mission. So the desert is a place where they can review their vocation and make a new covenant.

Of Jesus in the NT is said that he used to withdraw to a lonely (deserted) place to pray. A deserted place, away from other people, to be in front of God without the labels we or others built. There, alone, we need to be truthful in confronting God and his will. We want to find the truth about ourselves but often meet lies. The most common way of lying, nowadays, is not by saying false things (that would not work with God), nor denying the truth, but filling our mind with noise, thoughts, activities so we do not have time or capacity to face our problems and feel justified for not doing so.

People who are always in need of music, television, those who always talk, those who are hyperactive, not always are saints. Often they are people that do it unconsciously because they are afraid to face themselves, their shortcomings, the expectations of God, and, while they are over-busy, they have an excuse not to think. In the desert, we are forced to make decisions, either for God or against Him, but we cannot escape from our responsibilities. Great saints of charity like Mother Teresa spent hours in adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and while on one side she used to say that serving the poor is the best prayer, on the other side she insisted that her sisters would have 4 hours of personal prayer every day.

Our spiritual exercises, the meditation and the recollections are our deserts.

Desert is also a place of discomfort, and this is a very important aspect of our spirituality. You may be hungry but there is nowhere to buy food; thirsty, but no water available; too much sun, but no tree to give you shade; be in danger, but no shelter to run into for safety; fear but nobody to rely on. When there is

wind it blows sand on you which penetrates every part of your body creating a lot of distress. This experience brings us to the roots of our existence.

Very often we act pushed only by instincts and desires. The three big challenges posed by modern society to our religion and to the real meaning of human life are based on these. The big temptation today is to build a better world based only on "concrete material things" and let the things of God fade away. Bread and power become important and God useless. In the west very few are atheists, but the majority simply do not need God. When we lose the spiritual sight, God looks much less real than reality.

Pope John Paul II explains it well in the document Vita Consecrata where he speaks about the vows (VC 87). The desert is our teacher, from it we can learn to go without, learn to trust, learn priorities, learn what is temporary, what is passing, what is permanent and eternal.

The experience of the desert is important also in the matter of relationships. In order to handle properly my relationship with God, with myself and with the other, I need first of all to have such relationship, but I need also to be able to get away from them, sometimes, in order to reflect on them. When we are under the pressure of a problem, the brain does not work. When in our apostolate we are faced with some problems or even some requests like somebody asking for help, we must allow our compassion to get in union with them, but also remain free enough to withdraw and pray and reflect. First of all, we must see with our brain what is the best solution, then see with our faith what is God's solution otherwise we give to the poor only our solution or even no solution at all.

So the hardship of the desert and the fact that we are away from the situations, become instruments of purification.

There is a sentence in the gospel of Matthew (16:24): "*If you want to be a follower of mine deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me".* What does Jesus mean with the word "deny yourself"? We do not have to neglect our body but master it through discipline. We do not have to neglect our emotions but master them. We do not have to neglect our skills but master them. Our body is the instrument of our work. If you neglect it you reduce your capacity of being at service. Your emotions are the instrument of your love. If you neglect them then you will not be able to love. Your skills are God-given graces for the service of others: you cannot waste them.

So in this sentence, Jesus is not telling us to throw away his gifts but to discipline them, to keep them in the right place which is "service". If we allow our body to take command, then we will become lazy gluttons. If we allow our emotions to take over then we will fall into greed, lust, fear. If we allow our skills to take command, then we will fall into pride, efficiency.

These three aspects: body, emotions, skills, are the best instruments for our apostolate but are also the greatest dangers if not used in a mystic and prophetic way. Sacrifice and penance are the instruments to discipline them.

This is the meaning of the prophecy of Is 40:3 "*In the desert put straight the roads for the Lord*".

Look at John the Baptist (Mk 1:1-6). He goes into the desert to preach so those who come to him will be willing to repent.

The desert teaches us the real value of material things. Our society bombards us with advertisements so that we are no more able to choose what is best. Young people do not give any more importance to what is best but prefer what is trendy, famous, new, what others have or appreciate. That is why when faced with important decisions we need to go to the desert, away from all these influences, without our gadgets but also without the

comments of all people and put ourselves sincerely in search of "What does God want from me?"

Even from a psychological point of view, the much-needed unity between emotions, intelligence, and instincts, is possible only when you work on them from a detached point of view, in a place where none of the three is under pressure.

Desert and silence teach us to overcome the temptation of efficiency. Jesus (the Logos, the Word of God) at the incarnation became an infant (somebody who does not know how to speak). On the Cross, which is the summit of his mission, he says only 7 words and none of them to explain what is going on, in spite of the fact that nobody seems to have understood it. After the resurrection, he speaks only with the close disciples. The disciples were with Jesus for three years and witnessed all his miracles and words, but this was not enough for them to stand the failure of Jesus' capture and death. They needed to face the absence of Jesus, to acknowledge their failure, fear, etc. to be ready to accept him as the risen Lord.

Desert is the place where we meet not only God. The first order the Spirit gave to Jesus after baptism is to go to be tempted. Jesus has to enter the area of danger up to the very centre if he wants to save also the lost and last ones. So Jesus does not escape from people but trains himself to fight the evil through fasting and penance in prayer. Heb 2:17-18 "*Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."* Heb 4:15 "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin".*

Some passages by Don Orione on meditation:

"Even though our life seems to be a jolly one, and indeed it is in a Christian way because of the sweetest love of Jesus and the Holy Virgin, yet I must tell you that it is a normal life, life of prayer (we always weak up at 4:00 am in summer and at 5:00 am in winter to make common meditation), it is a life of mortification, a secret one, you may say, but of great mortification especially of our will. Of course, after that, we feel such spiritual consolations and such joy that make of this life the most beautiful and happy and easy one you may think of". (scr. 42,165).

"I deeply wish that without exceptions you set well your day with the holy meditation, and put in order your duties and all the good deeds the Lord may inspire you to do. Remain faithful to the obedience, which is the foundation of every virtue and of holiness". (scr. 73,237).

For personal work

- How much time do I dedicate to personal prayer?
- When I am in silence, do I feel the need to pick up a book, to say words? Am I easily distracted by the worries of the day?
- Am I able to break away from my work and activities to find some moments for my prayer?
- Do I plan my activities properly or am I easily pulled by the events?

Holy Mass: There is no greater love than the one who lays down his life for his friends. (Jn 15:12-17)

Jesus speaks of friends and this seems to be in contradiction with what we would call chastity, love, looking for the lost ones, loving the enemies: "*If you love those who love you which merit do you deserve? Even the pagans do so. But I say to you: love your enemies*" (Mt 5: 44-47). So which one is the greatest love: the one for the friends or the one for the enemies?

Before answering I want to pose another tricky question: can we really love our enemies? Understand me well, I do not want to go against the commandment of the Lord. The question is: who is an enemy? An enemy is somebody I fight against. If I fight I do not love, but if I love him he is no more an enemy. Here is the key to understand Jesus' sentence and also to love in a prophetic way: make your enemies become your friends. Jesus had no enemies, except the devil, which he scolds badly, all the others he forgave, redeemed, died for. We all are his friends, part of the family, and for all of us, he gave his life. If he would have died for us without loving us, his sacrifice would have been useless. Sometimes people make me smile when they come for confession and they say: "I try to forgive that particular person but I cannot forget what he did to me". I always answer: "Thank God that you cannot forget, otherwise you could not forgive". To forget is a selfish act, you want to obliterate a person from your life, your memory, how can you then love him? For-get is selfish, for-give is real love. You need to remember what happened and purify it with the blood of Christ, surrender it to him on the cross and say to Jesus: "If this makes me suffer, then I want to suffer on the cross with you, so Lord I forgive him as you forgave those who crucified you".

Later we will speak about the vow of chastity as a way to purify our love: let us ask ourselves: Can I really love everybody, or is there somebody whom I try to avoid, somebody who makes me feel sad whenever I think of him? Whatever happened in our life, no matter how bad or painful it had been, carries along with it some graces from the Lord. Trials, persecutions, can teach us a lot, but, only when we review those moments with love, we will be able to get the fruits of those graces. If we look at those moments with a grudge, sense of revenge, we just deepen our wound and increase the pain.

"When you live according to this spirit (love) then you always put others in front of you, happy to serve in them the Lord, and serve all men without any distinction and with diligence, with fervour and happiness, expecting no other recompense but the heavenly hope. Let us love one another: he who loves his neighbour fulfils the law. Even more, love not only fulfils the law but brings it to perfection".

"We must forgive, forgive everything and everyone. You must cover with a mountain of blessings not only those who do good to you but also those who hurt you".

1st Temptation and the vow of Poverty (Mt 4:1-4)

The first aim of the temptations is to make us forget or doubt our relationship with God: "*If you are the son of God*…" Satan wants us to use what God has given in order to prove what we are. So our skills, gifts, are not anymore at the service of the kingdom of God but a way to overcome our doubts. Psychologically speaking, to make you fight your doubts is the best way to put the doubt in you. The same sentence will accompany Jesus in the words of many people possessed by the devil when just before the miracle they would say: "I know who you are" as to put the doubt on Jesus. When Jesus is on the cross, the words of the bystanders are the same: "*He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son*." (Mt 27:42-43). Jesus is called to make a miracle in order to prove his relation with God. It is the temptation we face when we fall in the *efficientism*: we feel the need to perform well in the apostolate in order to prove that we are good religious or to be happy in our vocation. This is also the reason for many people to reject God; after all, he is not solving the problems of poverty and hunger in the world.

The second subtle aim of the temptation is in the fact that by making a miracle to satisfy his needs Jesus would prove that what we feel becomes automatically a right and should be satisfied. This puts material things above all else in our life. Jesus says quite clearly: "Man does not live on bread alone". Jesus reminds us that the spiritual is more important than the material. Not all material needs must be satisfied, some must be tamed.

Our vow is the spiritual answer to this temptation and to the problem of poverty in the world. By giving up possession we do not solve the problem of the hungry, the homeless, but teach ourselves and those around us that the solution of the problems of the poor does not come from miracles but from a culture of sharing.

Jesus, who refuses to make bread for himself, will not refrain to make bread for the thousands and finally give the bread of eternal life to all. Big nations speak a lot about poverty but have no idea of what it means. They speak about eradicating poverty but they cannot succeed because they lack the most important instrument: the courage to sacrifice and to share their richness.

On the other hand, Marxism used well the topic of sharing when it said that only communism can guarantee bread for all, but forgot completely the spiritual part and its leaders easily fell into greed and corruption.

In the episode of the multiplication of bread (Lk 9:12) Jesus gives people bread because they had left everything to go to him and listen to his word (man does not live on bread alone). The vow of poverty will be successfully lived only if we follow the dynamics of the miracle of the multiplication with its three preparatory moments: 1- To leave behind everything to follow Jesus, 2- to nourish ourselves on the word of God and 3- to step into the way of love which makes us realize the needs of the others and brings us to share with them the little we have.

When we do not respect this order of things, the material goods also collapse (see the fall of both Marxism and capitalism).

Pope John Paul II in the document Vita Consecrata 89 says clearly that the vow of poverty is needed in today's society to contrast the secular mentality according to which we must satisfy all our material desires, even when they contrast with the needs of others. The satisfaction of our material needs should

never be a priority, but subjected to the growth of our spiritual needs, and should never bring us to fight others but to share with them. Throughout history, we have examples of saints who lived poverty as a choice: the Church constantly needs such witnesses of the Beatitudes to contrast the mentality of the world.

That is why in Matthew 5:3 Jesus says: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of heaven*". Poor in spirit, because we can have people who are poor but curse their situation, they are not blessed. The promise Jesus makes to them is not to give the paradise, but to give the kingdom of God, which Jesus is preaching, that is to recognize his presence. If you change the position of the words in Jesus' sentence you will understand that better: To whom belongs the kingdom? (the fellowship of Jesus); who can be called Christian? Those who are poor in spirit. They are the lucky ones. This means that the fellowship of Jesus is possible only through poverty in spirit. It is not optional. Of course, if we pretend to be poor in spirit, but do not make it change our lifestyle, it is a lie and so will not bring us the bliss.

Somebody may say: "It is too difficult!", Jesus answers: "*Either you are salty or you are useless*" (Mt 5:13).

Some others may say: "But what will happen to us?", Jesus answers: "*God will take care of you. Look at the birds of the air and at the flowers in the fields*". And this is the third point regarding poverty: God will take care of us. Poverty is the way to show to God that we trust in him (Mt 6:26).

The challenge of religious life today is in this radical way of accepting and living the vows. Whatever else we do, other people can do too. In fact, nowadays we have many religious movements, secular institutes, and third orders, societies of apostolic life, which live, at different levels, their commitment to the Lord and to the world. They can adopt many of the styles of the world and do the same apostolate we do, in their own way

and as good Christians. It is not up to us to live that kind of commitment. We have one spirituality, they have a different one.
So the beatitudes are for all but the degree of commitment is different.
The 3rd beatitude is actually the same as the first. "Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth". In the Hebrew language, the words for poor and for meek are the same. In a society based on greed and power, those who were meek ended up always to be exploited and poor. Jesus says of himself: "*Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart*" (Mt 11:29).
Meekness is the way chosen by God to be king: look at all the prophecies about the Messiah. The meek will inherit the earth because the king of the earth is the "meek".
God promised the land to Abraham and Moses and Israel got it through great battles and fights. Now in the new covenant, this does not happen anymore: the land is given to the meek, not to the victorious. When we expect to conquer or achieve things only by using power, we are in the Old Testament and bound to fail. The trust in Providence, tells us that God will give us everything we are in need of, not in return to our merits but out of love.
So recapitulating we have three aspects necessary for living properly our vow of poverty:

- First place should be given to spiritual things Mt 6:33 "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the things shall be added unto you"*.
- We should concretely show trust in God.
- The fact we choose God should bring us to share our things with the others: share with the poor and provoke the rich.

This will automatically bring us to real detachment and also to the alienation of our material possession.

- First, we will do it in order to make space for spiritual things and better concentrate on them.
- Second, because we can share only what we have
- Finally, because when we do not have any more human security we remain only with our trust in God.

What are the challenges for religious today?

Too many of us worry mainly about material things. We look for a stable position and work, we look for comfort, we look for safety and efficiency so we ask for all the instruments that can make us successful.

- We ask first for what is necessary, then for what is useful, then for what could be useful, and finally, we end up in a much better and more comfortable position than those around us. To keep such a position we often have to say no to the requests of those who come to knock at our door.
- When Jesus sent the disciples to their first mission he ordered them to take nothing with themselves (Mk 6:8-9).
- We adjust to the mentality of the world and are afraid to be stumbling blocks for others.
- We are afraid to suffer or work hard: "*Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able*" (Lk 13:24).
- We find difficult to accept transfers, to get adjusted to new environments, new food, new climate.
- We become more and more independent.

Something by Don Orione:

"... Since I was the fourth child, my mother handed on to me my eldest brother's clothes. He is thirteen years older than I, and the poor woman had passed these clothes on to three others before me; but she left us a little money, which, in part, went to the first little

orphans of Divine Providence; she reared us well, to the honour of the world, as they say, and she used to make up little rags from the clothes she took from us, and the family triumphed in honest and moderate poverty.
My mother, the poor old countrywoman, used to get up at three o'clock in the morning, and then off to work. She was like a spindle going round; she was always doing something and keeping herself busy. She did a woman's work, and with her sons, she was even able to do a man's, for our father was far away working on Monferrato. He swung the sickle to cut hay, and the grass sharpened his sickle so that he did not need to bring it to the grinder; he made woven cloth from hemp, and my brothers made themselves many sheets: a lot of lovely washing, my poor mother!"

"Because the shepherds of old were poor, because they were simple and pious, the angel appeared to them; and, summoned to the cave at Bethlehem, their hearts were softened before the child Jesus. The Lord spoke to the humble, pure and simple. They were men of goodwill, and the angels proclaimed peace on them."

"... It is a humble religious Congregation, modern in its men and in its methods, consecrated solely and entirely to the good of the people and the people's children, and entrusted to divine providence.
It was born for the poor, and to achieve its aim, it sets up camp in the working-class centres, and, deliberately, in the most wretched districts and suburbs, on the outskirts of the great industrial cities, and there it lives, small and poor among the small and poor. It mixes with humble workers, with the comfort of the Church's blessing, with the valid support of the authorities and with all those spiritually open to the changing times, of open and generous hearts. It goes out to the people with more than words; it goes out

with the example and the holocaust of a life sacrificed with Christ, day and night, to the love and salvation of its brothers."

For personal work

- How much are we willing to give up in order to be faithful to the requests of the apostolate and those of the superiors?
- The people who live around us, and those who come daily to our works, which image of us do they have?
- What is there in my life that I would never give up? Why?
- If my superiors would ask me to go to a new assignment to a poorer house or area, maybe far, how would I feel?
- What worries me about my future?

DAY 4

2nd Temptation and vow of Chastity (Mt 4:5-7)

In analysing the temptations of Christ we follow the order of Matthew, not the one of Luke.

"Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands, they will bear you up so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Mt 4:5-7)

This temptation is very similar to the first: Satan invites Jesus to be a man of miracles. The difference stands in the aim of the miracle that here is not anymore the satisfaction of his needs, but to attract people, impress them in order to get their approval. The temple of Jerusalem was the place where the crowds of faithful would go to ask God to send the Messiah, and the priests and the rich business people would take advantage of the situation.

This addresses a more subtle need of human nature: the one of being recognized, approved, accepted. Looking from the human point of view after having won the approval of people it should be easier for Jesus to carry on the mission of the Messiah. This is the basic principle of modern society: propaganda, glamour to attract customers. It is just enough to look at all political elections.

But this is exactly the opposite of what Jesus does. He does not care for the approval of people and if this comes is because of his style of humility and service.

At first sight, the devil seems to be right. As long as Jesus is making miracles he has thousands of followers who want to make him king. When he stops making miracles they all go away. But ironically this is the proof that Jesus, instead, was right. As we see in Jn 6:26: "*Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves"* Jesus is aware that people do not follow him convinced of what he says, but out of interest. This is not true discipleship. They do not love him, they love his miracles.

Jesus, by nature, is a servant and does his work by true love which has his top moment on the cross, not when he performs miracles. That is why he keeps on telling the cured not to tell anybody about the miracle they received, but that is also why they do not obey him and go around to tell everybody what they received.

Our vow of chastity teaches us about real love which is not to impress the others and attract them to us. We do not seek to possess them, but to serve them in humility and detachment. They belong to God, not to us.

This is the core question of our vow of chastity: Do we look for a love based on interest, which satisfies our desires and instincts, or a pure love like the one of Jesus?

Whenever we look for human approval we actually go against the vow of chastity. In the past, maybe they taught us that chastity was mainly a matter of sexuality or sensuality, but in reality, it is much more. To try to possess the other person to satisfy my needs (physical or psychological or social or even spiritual) is a process that takes the focus, of what we do, away from God and puts it on ourselves. We put ourselves at the centre of the work, a place that belongs to God or to the neighbours. We often bring people to ourselves, not to God, so they get stuck with us and miss out on the purpose of their life: to be one with God.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus says: "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*" (Mt 5:8). Only through spirituality, we can see God present in others, otherwise, we see only the human. This beatitude is then saying to us that chastity is the way to live our spirituality, so the vow of chastity is not possible without deep prayer and union with God. The one who does not pray will soon fall.

We said that the 1st and the 2nd temptations are similar: the first is to possess material things, the second is to possess people. Chastity is poverty at a higher level. (even the third is an attachment to the self, and obedience is yet another proof of poverty).

Even a person who lives alone and rejects every relationship for the sake of a so-called "austerity", denies love and so goes against chastity.

Jesus refused to jump from the pinnacle of the temple in order to attract people (the pious or the powerful) but jumped into death and hell to save the lost and forgotten.

We meet a lot of people daily. There are people working with us and we treat them very coldly, just making sure they do their job properly and they are punctual; maybe we forget that they have families, problems, etcetera. Then we have the clients, the children of the school, their parents, the sick at the clinic, etc. We make sure that they understand that we are in charge, sometimes we encourage fear so we are sure they will not take advantage of us. Then we have friends and relatives and we are very affectionate to them, over-attached, abundant in phone calls and gifts. Finally, we have the members of our community and we are often cold, over-worried, expecting to be accepted, but spending little time to listen to them and understand them.

All these are exaggerated positions that show an immature level of relationship. Here is where the vow of chastity plays its role.

Chastity is the capacity of relationships. In spite of the strict rules of the Pharisees which would forbid men to talk publicly to women, Jesus is not afraid to approach the adulteress and forgive her (Jn 8,1-12); he is not afraid to allow the prostitute to kiss his feet and wash them with her tears and wipe them with her hair but defends her against the comment of the Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50). He is not afraid to stay alone with the Samaritan woman and talk to her, in spite of the comments of his disciples (Jn 4); he is not afraid to allow women to follow him (Lk 8:1-3); He is free in his relationship with Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42).

The mystical aspect of this vow is to see God in all people. Our constitutions say: "*Consecrated chastity does not shrivel up our heart. Rather it opens up our ability to love to the dimensions of the entire world. It makes us sensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters in imitation of the Christ, who shared in the life of human beings, loving them, doing good to them and offering himself for them. Thus we feel called to sublimate the finest feelings of our spirit and express them in mature and serene relationships by opening our hearts to spiritual fatherhood and to the life of communion" (Art. 21).*

The prophetic aspect is to love them all, possess none of them and finally carry them to Jesus. Jesus has loved them all freely, because looking at them he saw the desire of the Father to save them and he saw their desire for true love. He did not hold them, but he let them go on their way, he just gave the direction where to find God. 1 Jn 4:19-21. "*We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."*

What are the challenges for the religious today?

- To understand the vow of chastity as a real gift from God to us: "*he answered, "To you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them, it has not been given"* (Mt 13:11), a gift which is precious and valuable, of which we have to take care: "*But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us"* (2 Cor 4:7)
- The capacity of building inner freedom: "*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* (Jn 8:32). There is often the temptation of making compromises with sin (just a bit, just for while, just once), or of living in a double level (this is only in my private life, when I am with the other I am good), grooming wrong fantasies or desires which create dissatisfaction.
- Have the courage to love: "*For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* (Mt 5:46-48). We often create preferences, we treat somebody very well and dismiss others easily just because we like or dislike them. The religious, especially those in public positions, should be people of rectitude and at the same time compassion, clear in the rules but understanding of the limits of the others.
- Very important is the way we relate with people. I had the chance to spend time with the sister of Mother Teresa in a slum of Cairo. I was there for about a month to give classes to the junior sisters of North Africa province. They cannot do much for those poor people since they themselves do not have much, but the little they do, they always do it smiling,

encouraging, loving. The poor appreciate that and love them. On that occasion, I discovered that Mother Teresa had put it written in the constitutions that the sister should always smile when serving the poor. They really manage to see the suffering Christ in those helpless people.

- The final aspect is one of the relationships inside of our communities. Real love starts with the family. It is useless to go out and preach love when we are not able to practice it first at home. Love inside the community requires often patience, trust, forgiveness, but how safe we will be in relationships outside if we have a strong bond at home, and how weak we would be in the opposite situation.

For personal work

- Am I happy with my vocation? Myself? My work?
- Am I satisfied with the way I relate with the people around me?
- Is there in my life any particular friendship of which I feel a bit embarrassed or I would not like other people to know?
- Who are the people I am really attached to, and why am I attached to them?
- How do I treat my workers or the people whom I meet in my work?
- Who are the people I can say I really love? How do I express my love for them?
- Am I a busy person or do I have a lot of free time?
- Is there anything in my past life I feel guilty about, I find difficult to talk about or to think about?
- Do I love only those who love me back, accept only those who are grateful or those who can afford my services, or am I really following the teachings of the Gospel?

Holy Mass: Who will separate us from the love of Christ? (Rm 8,31-39; Lk 22,39-46)

Saint Paul has some amazing expressions about Love. We all know well the Hymn to love of 1 Cor. 13. For our reflection I have chosen, instead, chapter 8 of the letter to the Romans, which, according to me, is as strong as that of 1 Corinthians 13.

The whole letter to the Romans is about the problem in the relationship between the Law and the Spirit. Today too many people face the same problem: from the outside, they look obedient, but then they feel unable to control the strong drive of their emotions and instincts. Therefore today we can witness an increase in selfishness, individualism, apathy, laziness. People do not fall in many "big" sins, they do not go against any of the Ten Commandments, but they lack spirituality, a spiritual desire of knowing the true value of things and actions, they do not feel the need of being guided by the commandment of Love.

Many religious, while living the three vows, face the same challenge. One can easily say that he never committed any sin against them, but at the same time, he never lived them as a true consecrated person should do.

It is also true that if a person commits himself to take up seriously the challenges posed by the commandment of love and by his vocation, surely he will face struggles, renounces, oppositions and, sometimes, even persecution.

We know the page from the gospel about the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. The inner spiritual struggle of Jesus, which shows itself also on the physical level, comes from the strong desire to be faithful to his mission which was confronted by the many emotions, which he felt like a human person. He knew he was going to die and was afraid of it; he strongly desired to remain here on the hearth, to

continue his work; probably he felt also the doubt of having failed in his mission. Surely in that moment of prayer in the garden, all these ideas passed through his mind. At the end is his love for the Father that allows Him to make the final supreme act of obedience and to accept the idea that the project must go on.

3rd Temptation and vow of Obedience

Mt 4:8-10 "*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, "All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'".*

Now the devil tempts Jesus promising him authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. Jesus had come just for that reason: to reunite all kingdoms, so this is a Messianic temptation. Eph 1:9-10 "*he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*.". So the point is: should Jesus have it in the easy way of the devil or in the hard way of God?

The power given by the devil is human because is not connected with the will of God. How long can it stay? Authority on earth is valid and enduring only if it is connected with the one in heaven.

Jesus and the devil are on a high mountain. Jesus the "Gatherer" and the devil the "Scatterer". Jesus will be again on a mountain at Mt 28:18 and there he will say: "*now all authority has been given to me*". It is the authority of the risen Lord, but the resurrection passes through the cross. There he really gathers all nations: " '*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*" (Jn 12:32-33).

There is an interesting passage connected to this: the episode of Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas was a political rebel so for the people he would look a bit like a small Messiah (an earthly one, of course). Barabbas means "son of the Father". It is a typical

messianic title. Now people are called to choose between two Messiahs: the earthly one and the real one, and they choose the earthly. On a daily bases we choose human power, success rather than service and humility. Do we really understand Jesus? Do we really know him? The devil tempts us in small things. He is not so stupid to suggest to you to choose the evil, but he suggests that you choose the reasonable, the obvious, and the one choice which will easily succeed.

Look at the involvement of the Church with politics, at the compromises with human power, etc. Jesus has to remind continuously his disciples that all the prophets spoke of him, the meek, the harmless, crucified and risen. "*O foolish men, slow of heart to believe*..." (Lk 24:25).

Everyone who claims that he can make a perfect world (a better school, a better hospital) by his own power, works for the devil.

It seems that Jesus didn't do much for humanity. He is the prince of peace but wars are still there; he cured many sick people but sicknesses are even more than before; poverty is still very much present in the world, and maybe even worse than before.

What did Jesus bring then? He brought GOD!!!

Now we know him, we can call upon him, we know the way, the truth, and the life: The truth about our life, our destiny, and the way to achieve it.

So the main task of our religious life is obedience to the plan of God, giving up any earthly power in the name of the divine power which means he is the boss and we the servants, in his name, with love.

This is an important topic because, in my opinion, this is the most crucial of the three temptations.

In the view of St. Benedict, and of most of the founders, the vow of obedience is the most important of the three. Independence, freedom of choice are deeply rooted in our lives, even in the

poorest person, and to give up that costs much more than to give up material things and also to give up a family. When I was in India I used to say to sisters: think about a girl from a poor family. She has in front of her the perspective of living in a hut in a slum together with a drunkard husband because her parents cannot afford to pay the dowry to a decent man. She is surely willing to join in a convent and become a nun. For her, this is a promotion, not a sacrifice. But will she be willing to surrender her pride, her ideas, and her independence?

There is a second misunderstanding in many of our religious. They create a contrast between the authority and the vow of obedience as if superiors do not need any more to follow the vow.

Authority is given by God for a purpose and he can take it away at any moment. See Jn 19:11. Jesus says to Pilate: "*You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above".* So in order to understand well authority we have to keep in mind three points:

- Authority is at the service of the kingdom of God and subjected to it. Jn 18:36 "*My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."*
- Authority is at the service of the good of the Congregation and of the community and subjected to it.
- In spite of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, nobody can claim for himself to own the truth, so humility is of great help for superiors.

Consequences of these three points are the facts that:

- Authority is not a matter of power, but of service. Mk 10:42-45 "*whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be*

your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." We know how much Pope Francis insists on this point.

- Authority is true when it is exercised in love. Jn 13:13-14 "*Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet".*
- Authority needs to combine the two aspects of dialogue and decision making; of humility and courage.
- Both obedience and authority, if lived in truth, do not bring glory but sacrifice, because they are based on the example of Christ. It is exactly this sacrifice that brings us the reward from God. Phil 2:5-9 "*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name"*.
- Both the one who makes the decisions and the one who obeys will face doubts, sometimes even deep doubts of faith or conscience, but Jesus faced the same in the garden of Gethsemane: "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want*". Mt 26:39-42.
- Authority and obedience will work only if in the community there is mutual trust among the members.

What are the challenges for religious today?

- We need to have always our mind focused on God and the search of his will, controlling our own interests. Mt 7,21 "*Not*

everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven". This means that our obedience and our authority are both rooted in prayer and before taking decisions, we should spend some time in meditation. Remember that Jesus was spending nights in prayer before any important decision. 1 Cor 2:12-14 "*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned"*.

- Have clear in mind that this search for the will of God is more important than anything else and must be the fuel that makes the engine of our apostolate move. Jn 4:34 *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."*
- In our examination of conscience, we should check always how much our desires of fulfilment, power, being served, influence our choices.
- Regarding obedience we should avoid the temptation of falling in simple compliance: "I did my duty". Many religious are afraid of taking up responsibilities, being proactive, being creative and limit themselves to do whatever is requested of them to do. This creates an atmosphere of master and servants rather than a family spirit where all are brothers. Jn 15:15 "*I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father".*

- We must build communities where there is a family spirit, concern for each other, trust.

Some words by Don Orione.

"*Zeal is good only if it comes from obedience; all the good you may be able to do to people would not be accepted by God if it goes against obedience".*

For personal work

- How active am I in the community? How busy in my life?
- Do I consider the community as my family, and the house as my home or do I have the feeling of being in a hostel?
- What are the things I want to fulfil in life?
- How do I consider the work of God in my life, my society, etc.?
- Is there something more I could do for the betterment of my community, and for the Congregation?
- How do I relate to rules and regulations?
- How do I consider our Constitutions: lax, strict, possible, idealistic?
- How much am I willing to sacrifice in order to remain faithful?

DAY 5

We bring out what we experience inside: Need of Apostolate

A great part of our days and our life are dedicated to the apostolate. Jesus himself dedicated a lot of time to the poor. All founders underlined well that we are meant for the poor, and our congregation is registered among those of active life, not of the contemplative. So is that in contradiction with what we said till now about the need for being mystics? Nobody denies the importance of the apostolate but the challenge is to consider it in its holistic dimension. Every apostolate has always two dimensions: to help the needy and to witness the Kingdom of God. So the real question is to discover, which is the place of our apostolate in the plan of God.

The apostolate is a necessary part of religious life, even for the congregations of the contemplative life. Pope Francis insists very much that our faith and witness become real going out towards the farthest, the most needed and rejected.

When we look at our works of charity (especially in places like Europe in which they seem to have become redundant since the governments are doing the same work and with better equipment), we must have clearly in mind two things: the target of our apostolate and the message we present.

Our works of charity act always on three levels: 1st target is the needy (being them people with disabilities, elderly, poor, etc.). 2nd target is the people involved with our works, which means our staff, the relatives of our clients and the volunteers who, on different levels, come to help us. They too are a target of our apostolate. 3rd target, not less important, is the whole society, all

those who do not know us, will never enter our premises. By seeing from outside the work we do, they must be provoked to reflect on the value of life, the need of service, the need of caring for the weak, the goodness of religion, etc. So the target of our works is not only the clients we serve directly.

Regarding the message we want to send to all the three categories, this is also by-folded:

1st message which should always be there and be clear is about God's love that cares for all. That is why we love them: because God loves them, and they are precious to Him, and they must feel it through our work. 2nd Also the Church loves them and we witness the concern of the Church through our work. We do not speak only about our Congregation, we always speak in the name of the whole and local Church and work in communion with it.

Let us see the different dimensions of apostolate that need to be considered:

1- Theological dimension: God sent his Son to reconcile the world to himself. He wants all of us to participate in his life. So any apostolate has as a goal the "total" salvation of the person and of the society. Now, the material uplift of the person (intellectual, medical, social, etc.) is the exterior aspect, the only visible. It is a very important aspect, otherwise, our apostolate loses credibility, but is not the only aspect and not even the most important one. "*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*" (Mt 6:33).

2- Spiritual dimension: Christ came to redeem us. He is the only and universal Redeemer so every apostolate has to be Christ-centred. "*For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the*

wisdom of God" (1Cor 1:22-24). We cannot make an apostolate that has no Christ in it. We cannot plan an apostolate only based on our skills, our structures, etc. We cannot have an apostolate which does not pass through our daily Eucharist, our daily meditation, etc. We cannot have an apostolate which is perfectly and strictly tied to the structure, the rules, etc. because often the Spirit breaks our standards. Any structure, by nature, makes a selection and tends to eliminate those who do not fit in it (who, most of the times, are those really in need).

3- Social dimension: God wants to save everyone, so the target of our apostolate is "everyone", especially the neediest, including the sinners, those who reject God, those who refuse our mission. "*Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.*" (Lk 15:4-5). This does not mean that we have to convert them or force them to become Christians. It means, instead, that the "good news" of Salvation has to reach them. Most of the times this will be done through our attitude, rather than through words. Our apostolate for them will be our acceptance, understanding, and forgiveness.

4- Methodological dimension: Apostolate is a work of Christ so it must have the style of Christ (Phil 2:5-8). We will see later the characteristics of Jesus' style. Of course, we need a daily confrontation with the Gospel, and that is why I said that our apostolate has to pass through our meditation. We should also ask ourselves: Am I sure that what I do is the will of God, as he wants it?

5- Ecclesial dimension: As we said this morning Jesus did not do everything by himself but worked as a group, and

entrusted to this group, which eventually developed into the Church, the mission of continuing his apostolate. So apostolate cannot appear like a work of one person (even when there is only one person working in it) but has to be community work and Church work. We always work in the name of the Church, inside of the plan of the Church and in communion with the other organizations and congregations which work in the Church. Think for a moment at the competition often existing between different institutions, schools, the gossips we spread among people about other congregations or even about bishops or the Church. Even if what we say is the truth, such gossips create division, and division is always the work of the devil.

6- Emotional dimension: this dimension is more important than expected because apostolate is basically a relationship and in every relationship emotions are important. When we deny emotions we fall into formalism, cold administration of business; on the other side when we overvalue emotions we lose sight of the priorities and of the real purpose of the apostolate. This usually ends up in disaster. Emotions have to be considered on both sides: the people we serve and also ourselves. The person whom we are helping has to be redeemed in the wholeness of his personality, so we should be always aware not to hurt him, not to humiliate him, not to exploit him. The person should feel that she/he is understood, accepted, loved, even when we cannot help him materially. If our task is to distribute the love of God, how can we do it in a rude way, without love? Our side too, is important. It is normal and good to feel satisfaction for what we do, but the search for satisfaction should not prevent us from doing works which are not rewarding, which are dangerous, difficult, which have a high risk of failing, which

are less prestigious, glamorous, appreciated. We must feel empathy and compassion for people, but at the same time, we should avoid attachments which usually bring us to make preferences, create divisions, jealousies, etc. If we make apostolate for ourselves, for our satisfaction and we are concerned only to please people, to attract them to us instead of bringing them to Christ, then we are like the evil tenants of the vineyard of the parable: God will eventually take away the vineyard from us and give it to somebody else. (Mt 21:33-45) We have, instead, to let them go and we lose them.

Maybe we can read in this way the present vocations' crisis in the religious life and the increase of Lay movements. As he had warned about the vineyard keepers who wanted to steal the harvest, so also he warns against the thieves who come to steal the sheep: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy"* (Jn 10,10). The Good Shepherd points out clearly on the attitude of Jesus: saving everybody even the most lost, especially the most lost. He says clearly: "*I have other sheep as well, and there may be one flock under one shepherd*". The shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The figure of the shepherd shows the attitude of our apostolate. Being shepherds is not much a matter of preaching, although in many Churches especially the protestant ones, the idea of shepherd and pastor became a synonym of a preacher. The main feature of the shepherd is caring, protecting, going out to get back the stray, guiding (mainly with example). Ps 23 ends: mercy and goodness will follow me and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord.

In the apostolate, there is always the temptation of looking for success, fulfilment, and sometimes apostolate becomes a way of

escaping from the community life that does not satisfy me, is boring or demanding.

Coming back to the point said above about having the style of Christ we have to be careful about the temptation of efficiency which is to set the value of our work according to the results we get. The miracles of Jesus converted nobody. Many people followed him but then they went. The two biggest miracles of Jesus were followed by the biggest apostolic failures: After the multiplication of the bread, people went away forever (Jn 6). Many, though they saw the miracles, were not willing to listen to the words of Jesus and especially not willing to accept his corrections. After the resurrection of Lazarus, comes the final decision to kill Jesus (Jn 12).

Many saints made more miracles than Jesus, and some of you may have helped or even saved more people than Don Orione or Jesus. Many doctors or surgeons, with nowadays technology, save more lives than Jesus did. Many of our works distribute more bread than Jesus did with the multiplication. Jesus has been the least efficient person. As a Messiah, he should have brought peace, defeat poverty, re-establish Israel's kingdom, etc. He managed none of these tasks.

Some words from Don Orione.

. . . Being able to see and love nothing in the world but the souls of our brothers.

The souls of the small, the souls of the poor, the souls of sinners, the souls of the just, the souls of those astray, the souls of the penitent, the souls of those who rebel against God's will, the souls of those who rebel against Christ's Church, the souls of degenerate sons, the souls of unfortunate and perfidious priests, the souls that submit to grief, souls white as doves, the simple, pure and angelic

souls of virgins, souls which have fallen into the darkness of the senses and the low bestiality of the flesh, souls proud of evil, souls greedy for power and gold, souls full of themselves, souls that only see themselves, lost souls, looking for the way, grieving souls that seek shelter or a word of pity, souls that cry out in the desperation of condemnation, or souls intoxicated in their elation at the truth they have lived out: all these souls are loved by Christ, Christ died for all of them and Christ wants them all safe in his arms and his wounded heart.

Our lives and our entire Congregation must be a song and a holocaust of universal brotherhood in Christ. Seeing and feeling Christ in man. We must have in us the profound music of charity. For us, the central point of the universe is Christ's Church, and that on which the Christian drama turns, the soul.

I feel nothing but an infinite, a divine symphony of spirits palpitating around the cross, and the cross exudes, drop by drop, across the centuries, the divine blood spilled for every human soul.

Christ cries out from the Cross 'I am thirsty'. It is a terrible sultry cry, not of the flesh, but the cry of thirst for souls, and it is for this thirst for our souls that Christ died.

I can see nothing but heaven, a truly divine heaven, because it is the heaven of salvation and a true peace: I can see nothing but a kingdom of God, the kingdom of charity and pardon, where the whole crowd of peoples are the inheritance of Christ and the kingdom of Christ.

Perfect happiness cannot but be perfect dedication of self to God and men, to all men, to the most wretched as to the most morally and physically deformed, to the most distant, the guiltiest and the most adverse.

O Lord, put me in the jaws of hell, so that I, by your mercy, may close them. May my secret martyrdom for the salvation of souls, of all souls, be my paradise, my supreme bliss. Love of souls, souls souls! I shall write my life in tears and blood.

May the injustices of men never weaken our full faith in God's goodness.

I am nourished and led forward by the breath of immortal and renewing hope.

Our charity is the sweetest folly of love for God and men, which is not of the earth.

Christ's charity is of such sweetness and so unspeakable that the heart cannot think nor say, the eye not see, and the ear not hear.

Words ever aflame.

Suffering, silence, prayer, love, crucifixion and adoration.

Light and peace of heart

I shall climb my Calvary like the meek lamb.

Apostolate and martyrdom; martyrdom and apostolate.

Our souls and our words must be white, chaste, almost infantile, and they must bring to all men a breath of faith, goodness and comfort, which uplifts us towards heaven.

Let us keep our eyes and our hearts still in divine goodness. Building Christ! Building always!

Petra autem est Christus!

(from notes made on 25 February 1939, cf. I.C., p. 328ff)

For personal work

- Does my apostolate really have God at the center?
- Have I ever had to give up some of my projects or ideas that I was particularly fond of? How did I react?
- How much collaboration is there with the structures of the Diocese or other congregations?

Holy Mass: The treasure in the field and the precious pearl (Mt 13:44-46)

This we have heard today is one of the parables of the Kingdom. It is, actually, not a parable but an allegory because is very short, more like an example or a comparison.
The points to underline in this passage are 2:

1) The great value of what is found
2) The great desire to possess it to the point of giving up everything for it.

A treasure is something that can change the life of that farmer forever, so it is really worthy to put everything at loss for the sake of getting it. Do you remember the passage of St. Paul to the Philippians (3:7-8): *I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.*
So this treasure is something that inspires in you a strong desire, moves you to a great effort even a crazy one in order to achieve it. There comes the courage of the saints, the one gave the strength to be a saint.
The importance of the treasure is not that you found it because of your long research (like the merchant) or by pure chance (like the farmer). The Lord shows himself whenever he wants, in the most unexpected way.
It is not important if it comes as the fulfilment of your dreams as it happened to the merchant who had already other pearls, or it makes in you a radical change as it happened to the farmer that from servant became a rich owner.

What is important is that we are willing to risk everything, to surrender everything in order to embrace this new step in our life.

A piece of a letter by Don Orione to a young man who wants to join the Congregation.

Be warned, my son, that whoever is called by the Lord must truly say goodbye forever to the life of the world and to earthly thoughts, and must give himself to the Divine service with the utmost loving piety and devotion; with the most careful avoidance of any shadow of danger or distraction; with a total denial of himself for the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and obeying in everything and always, as a most joyful son, our Holy Mother Church and her Head, the Roman Pontiff, the earthly Vicar of Our Lord and gentle Christ visible on earth - to whom our little Congregation is particularly bound - and the Superiors whom God will give you in the Congregation; thus you will be able to deserve of the Lord that the great gift of your vocation will be ever more confirmed and that He will help you to fulfil it, following Our dear Lord also in the practice of the Holy Evangelical Counsels.

You will have noticed that I have said that such a state of life is a supreme grace, according to God.

I said that because it is certainly not so according to the world; while the true Religious gives up every interest in the world; only the Lord and His most Holy Cross will be the portion of his inheritance.

My dear son, observe that when you come to us we are poor and that you also will have to lead a life of religious poverty for the love of Jesus Christ, Who is our Divine example. He was born poor. He lived poor. He died poor on a cross, without even a drop of water.

But Jesus, our sweet God and Father, is with us and we live a happy life as it is sufficient to possess Jesus.

He will be with you and console you and you will find greater spiritual joy and more contentment and happiness living in the poverty and mortification of Our Lord than if you were rich with all the wealth and transient pleasures of this poor world.

Dear son, in joining us take heed that you will have to live as if you were crucified with Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified since "The Imitation of Christ" says clearly, "the life of a good religious is the cross" - which means in practice that Jesus really is with us, really loves us and really serves us on the cross.*

And this should be the life of a good religious: to crucify at the feet of Jesus our freedom, our will, our life, and all our senses and feelings. This should be done with the grace that God always gives to those who pray to Him.

Take note also, dear Marabotto, that you will not have anything more to expect from the world, other than labours, sufferings and persecutions for the love of our God, the Pope and souls.

You will also have to be a most faithful follower in everything - including your desires - of the Holy Father and a devout son of his and of the Holy Church of Rome and of the most venerated Bishops who are with the Pope, even to a total emptying of yourself, even to death. You will have to be one with them, love them and defend them just as a son would defend his father, as - if you did otherwise - you would be utterly betraying the spirit of what we profess.

Throw yourself therefore at the feet of Our Lord and place everything in the hands of the Most Blessed Virgin and pray, pray continuously my son, with humility and without idle chat about your resolution; and afterwards, if you feel that God is continuing to call you, go to your confessor and take advice from him again, asking him to bless you; and then go to your mother and father and open your heart to them. Ask your parents to bless you and to let you consecrate your whole life to the Lord.

The apostolate of Jesus

But what was Jesus' style? Let us analyse some passages from the bible:

1) Mk 6:34 "*He felt pity for them*". He was fully concentrating on them because of his love.
2) He felt pity because they were like sheep without a shepherd, so they were in need of a guide, of God, before being in need of bread.
3) Mk 6 the miracle of the multiplication of bread is prepared and concluded by prayer.
4) The miracles are always at the service of preaching, of salvation.
5) If the apostolate is always at the service of saving people, when does Jesus really save them? On the cross, when he gives himself for the people when he suffers and dies for them. The other miracles give only temporary solutions (people eventually get sick again, and die again).
6) Phil 2 He emptied himself and took up the nature of a servant … he walked in the path of obedience all the way till the Cross.
7) In Mk 10,21 we have Jesus talking to the young rich man with "an attitude of love".
8) In Mk 10,13-16 we have Jesus spending time playing with children, "to whom the Kingdom of heaven belongs".
9) In Jn 4 and Lk 24, we have Jesus giving catechism to the Samaritan woman and the disciples of Emmaus. We can note the way he approaches them: he gets interested in their life and experience. With that attitude, he arrives to teach the good news. Patience, listening, provoking slowly, etc.

What did Jesus say about the apostolate

Read Mt 10

1) Jesus calls
2) Jesus gives the authority (provides them with the skills)
3) Then we have the list of the apostles: they are not exactly the best or the most suitable. We have a famous say that goes: Jesus does not choose the skilled but gives skills to those he chooses.
4) The formation is an important part. He formed them for three years with small periods of experience like the one of this chapter.
5) When he eventually sends them, their mission is limited and at the service of Jesus coming to visit in those villages.
6) This experience is also useful for their formation. The real mission of the apostle will come only after Pentecost.
7) The main duty of apostolate is "proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near".
8) The social activities are an important part of the mission.
9) The apostolate will not make you rich or successful; at the same time apostolate does not need you to be rich: trust in Providence.
10) Work with people, cooperate with them, make use of their help but be careful in choosing with whom you cooperate.
11) Distribute your peace to everybody though it is up to them to accept it or not.

What can I expect during the apostolate:

1. "*I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves*". The apostolate is never easy or safe, therefore: difficulties are never a reason for rejecting the apostolate.

2. We must be clever, not stupid, but honest; without cheating.
3. When we act honestly we find rejection, slander and persecution on our path. They are not a sign that our testimony is wrong, on the contrary, they are often the highest moment of it. This also happened to Jesus, but in the end the truth will always win.
4. So don't be afraid, fear instead those who take away your spirituality, not those who take material things away from you.
5. We must never doubt the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Persecutions are, in reality, the moments in which He works the most.
6. Misunderstanding and rejection can also come from the superiors, and these are the most painful moments.
7. It may be necessary to give up a place but we must never give up on the mission, accept partial defeats, but not total defeat. We must have a more global view of God's plan.
8. We cannot put ourselves above God. Whenever it comes to making decisions, nothing should be considered more important than God. This refers to how we make our decisions: what are we looking for? Are we looking for honour, praise, etc.? Spiritual goods should come first. True success is not to be found here on earth but in eternal life.
9. Those who seek the success of their life (career, achievement, etc.) will lose it; those who renounce it for the sake of the apostolate, obedience, poverty, etc. they will be the ones who will win.
10. God knows everything and will take care of everything.
11. Always have the image of the crucified Christ before you.

Some more words by Don *Orione*

. . . Let us open up a new divine world to many peoples, let us yield with loving sweetness in understanding the small, the poor and the humble.

May we always want to boil over with faith and charity.

May we always want to be holy, alive to others and dead to ourselves.

Our every word should be a breeze from the open skies: all people should feel the flame that burns in our hearts, and the light of our inner fire; finding there God and Christ.

Our devotion should not leave people cold and bored, for it must be truly and wholly alive and full of Christ.

We must thirst for martyrdom.

Serving in men the Son of man.

In order to conquer for God and to win others over, we need, first, to live are intense life of God within ourselves, to have inside us a dominating faith; a great ideal the denial of ourselves for others—should be the flame that burns and shines in us, setting our lives on fire in an idea and a sacred love which is stronger.

No one who serves two masters—the senses and the spirit—can ever discover the secret of winning souls.

We must say the words and perform the tasks that will outlive us.

Mortification of ourselves in silence and secret.

We must be saints, but we must be such saints that our saintliness does not limit itself to the faithful, nor remain only within the Church, but transcends and throws such a shining light, such a great life of love of God and man on society, that we are more than saints of the Church; we are saints of the people and saints of social wellbeing.

We must be a very deep vein of mystic spirituality that penetrates every social stratum: meditative and active spirits, 'servants of Christ and the poor'.

Do not give yourselves over to the vanity of letters, do not let yourselves swell up with worldly things.

Communicate with your brothers only to edify them, communicate with others only to spread the Lord's goodness.

(1) Love Christ in all men.

(2) Serve Christ in the poor.

(3) Renew Christ in us, and restore Christ in everything.

(4) Save, always save all people, save at the cost of every sacrifice, with redeeming passion and a redeeming holocaust.

The great souls, the great and magnanimous hearts, the strong and free Christian consciences, that feel their mission of truth, faith and great hope, of holy love of God and man, walk in the light of a great, great faith, 'that faith' in divine providence. They walk without stain, without fear, per ignem et acquam, through the filth of so much hypocrisy, so much perversity and dissolution.

Let us carry with us, and indeed inside us, that divine treasury that is God, and though we must go out among peoples, let us keep that heavenly silence in our hearts, a silence no earthly noise can interrupt, and the inviolate cell of the humble perception of ourselves, where the soul speaks to the angels and to Christ the Lord.

Around us there will be no shortage of scandal and the false shame of the scribes and Pharisees, nor of malevolent insinuations, nor of calumnies and persecution. My sons, we should not have the time to 'turn our heads to guide the plough', for as much as our mission of charity drives and presses us, as much as our love of our neighbour burns within us, so much will the divine, scorching fire of Christ consume us.

We are intoxicated with charity, fools of the Cross and Christ crucified.
Above all, in our humble, holy lives full of good, we must take the small and the poor into our charge, and follow God's path. We must live in a radiant sphere, intoxicated with light and the divine love of Christ and the poor, and of heavenly dew, like the lark that soars upward, singing in the sun.
Let our table be like the ancient Christian agape. Souls! Souls!
Have great hearts and the divine folly of souls!

(from notes without precise date of 1939, cf. I.C., p. 324ff)

For personal work:
Read the following passage and analyse your way of approaching the poor to see if it corresponds to that required by the Gospel.
The good Samaritan: Lk 10:25-37

DAY 6

Up to the Cross: The suffering and the purification

St Paul says to Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-13) "*Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived*."

During Holy Week, we reflect on the mystery of Christ's suffering and death. To us, it must be clear the fact that the death of Christ on the cross was not an accident or a mistake. Jesus could have chosen a road of glory and success, instead, he decided to choose the condition of the poorest, the persecuted, and lived and died like them. This choice, not only gave hope to all who suffer but gave value to sufferance itself. In Mt 5 we have two Beatitudes which speak more directly about this: "*Blessed those who mourn"* (5:4)*; "Blessed those who are persecuted for righteousness"* (5:10). Of course, there is also the conclusion of the beatitudes which, speaking more directly says: "*Blessed are you when people persecute you*, etc." (5:11) In the first there is the statement: "*because God will console them*". This gives hope for the solution to the problems. The second one instead, does not say that God will solve the problem, or prevent people from hurting you or killing you, and doesn't say that he will revenge you. The beatitude is in the suffering itself because it becomes the way to ensure the kingdom of Heaven. As He saved the world through his sufferance, so our suffering, on many occasions, can

contribute to the salvation of the world, and of course of ourselves. Furthermore, we can notice that while in the 8 beatitude the reward is always posed in a future form (will …), here it is in the present (yours is …)

The word "mourning" in the beatitude should not be misunderstood as complaining or as something indicating a passive attitude, something preventing us from acting. The meaning of this word in the bible is actually the opposite. The bible is full of mourners. (Ez 27) the people mourn because the city is full of bad persons, but these mourners make penance and fasting and will be the only saved. Mary at the feet of the cross is mourning and her mourning changes into com-passion and so unites her with God in his plan of salvation. So this mourning has to be interpreted as suffering "with" those who suffer unjustly. We have to unite this beatitude with the 8th: blessed those who are persecuted for righteousness. We need active mourning which is not conformity with evil. The powerful people of the world like sadness because it numbs our conscience, and if we react to it, they persecute us. To take the stand of the poor and the rejected is to take the stand against the structures of sin which created poverty and rejection.

We spoke already a lot about apostolate and the way to do it. Now I want to concentrate a bit more on sufferance itself.

There are different kinds of sufferance: some are physical, some are psychological or emotional or moral. Some are due to our mistakes, some to the wrongdoing of other people without any participation of ours. Some can be avoided, others cannot. Some seem useful like when we work hard to achieve a goal, other useless like when we have a headache. Some leave space for hope, other present no hope like an incurable disease. Since they are different, they will have a different impact on us, but what makes really the difference is our attitude towards them.

There is a beautiful movie which can show us what I mean: Its title is "*of Gods and Men"*. It speaks about the life of a group of Trappist monks who lived in a Muslim village in Algeria. They were well-loved and respected by the local population, but in the country, the fundamentalists started killing Christians and burning churches and so these monks, who were all French, became a possible target. After a first threatening visit to the monastery by the terrorists, the community had to decide if they were to leave and go back safe to France or stay there facing the ever-growing possibility of death. Of course, the local people wanted them to stay. After a lot of prayer and discernment, they all decided to stay. The superior had this beautiful explanation: "We continue our activity here among these people, we do not look for death, and as much as possible we will try to avoid it, but if it will come we will accept it in the name of the Lord". Eventually, the terrorists took them all as hostages and killed them. What we look for in our apostolate is not the suffering or the persecution, but the consistency of our life and our witness. This will call for sufferance, and then we accept it, try to solve what is possible, offer with faith what is impossible.

What sufferance does to us:

1. It teaches us faith and trust in Providence: God will not abandon us. Think again about efficiency. Everything should be ok, perfect functioning, giving good results. A defeat or a situation, in which we feel not able to cope with, will remind us the purpose for which we are here and also the fact that he is the only Saviour and we are here for him; His ways are not like our ways.
2. It makes us understand better the mystery of Christ and his love for humanity; Of Jesus himself, the letter to the Hebrews says: "*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered*" (5:8). Most of the founders of

religious congregations, in history, had a great devotion to the spirituality of the cross. In today's society, especially in western society, there is a strong movement of people who want to get rid of the cross. Many forbid crosses in schools or public places. They claim that they do this in the name of freedom of conscience and religion, respect for those who do not believe. It is not so; there is much more. I lived near a Hindu temple, and it didn't take away my freedom. If that applies to religion it should apply to any product which we may not like. It is a fact that the cross reminds us of weakness, defeat, death. Modern society is a society of success, victory, power, self-affirmation, the opposite of what the cross of Jesus preaches about.

3. It makes us understand better the sufferance of other people and so it teaches us compassion. Often when a poor person knocks at our door, we feel disturbed, interiorly we criticize him for not working, for drinking, for being dirty and not taking care of himself, for being rude or cheating, etc. All these thoughts of ours are ways of justifying our bad feelings and the fact that we do not want to help them. When we find ourselves in a situation of need we start seeing things in a different way, from a different point of view and become less critic, more understanding.
4. It is necessary to strengthen us. There is nothing in life that comes cheap. Whatever is precious needs hard work to be achieved and hard work brings along physical pain as well as the pain of having to give up other things. There was once a boy who observed a cocoon cracking and the young butterfly coming out. It was struggling to push with its shoulders to break the cocoon and make space to come out. The boy felt pity and, in order to help the butterfly, broke the cocoon so the butterfly came out easily. When the day

passed, the other butterflies started flying, this one could not. The boy was disappointed. What had happened is that the struggle to break the cocoon with their shoulders is not only for the sake of coming out but is a first exercise that strengthens the shoulders so that when the butterfly starts flying they can bear the strain of the flapping. That particular butterfly lacked that strength. Who has everything easy in life will fall at the first small difficulty. People who have never been sick in life not necessarily live longer. Sometimes simple flu can kill them because they never built up antibodies.

5. It helps us to appreciate many things in our life, which otherwise we give for granted, and be grateful for them. Think about life, health, a good house, the possibility of studying, friendship, etc. They are great treasures indeed but often we come to know that only when we lose them.
6. When accepted in a positive way, sufferance makes us discover so many qualities and potentialities we have inside and which we were not aware of. Sometimes I happened to visit houses for street children: it is amazing to see how skilful they are, how smart, intelligent and able to come out of any situation. Sometimes our seminarians, who are well protected and for whom everything is readymade, do not know how to accomplish even the simplest task we entrust to them, without coming and asking for explanations ten times. An interesting fact is that, after the resurrection of Jesus, the Christians were staying among the Jews only. It was because of the persecutions that they were forced to escape from Israel and go all over the world, carrying with them also the “Word”. As a consequence of it, not only Israel had the chance of becoming Christian, but the whole world too, and this due to the persecutions, not due to power.

7. Suffering is necessary to keep us humble: when we feel weak or in danger we learn that we need somebody else's help. You know that pride is one of the biggest enemies of our life and also of community life. It is good that sometimes we are forced to ask for the help of others. Jesus, while carrying the cross to Calvary fell and needed to allow somebody else to help him. He must have felt humiliated, ashamed to have forced poor Simon to undergo such a struggle. My mother is not a proud person but, in her life, she has always worked hard, and still does so. She managed a big family and still found time to help others. The only thing is that she never had to ask anybody for help because she acquired so many skills. Now she is 86 and still is always in movement from the morning at 5:00 till evening. A few years ago she fell and broke her ankle. Doctors had to apply plaster and told her to avoid putting down the leg for forty days. She never complained of pain but the thing she found very difficult to accept was to have to depend on somebody else, or as she would put it "to be served". It was a needed and beneficial experience.
8. It sets an example for many Christians who approach us. If you notice in every nation, at the beginning of Christianity there are martyrs and they are honoured and are the strong foundations of those churches.

Sufferance is a way of purification. We promised our whole life to the Lord, but there are so many parts of it that we haven't surrendered yet. I would like to present a four-level purification that sometimes the Lord imposes on us through our apostolate.

1- Purification from attachment to material things: when we lose something, we learn how to let go of the things which are not really important and concentrate on those who are essential. This is more or less what we have been saying till

now. We do apostolate but feel unable to achieve many of the things we planned.

2- The second level of purification comes when in our apostolate we work hard to help somebody and these do not appreciate what we do, they are not grateful, pretend more and more, spoil what we do for them. The Lord maybe is asking us: for whom are you working, for me or for yourself? For my Kingdom or for your gratification?

3- A third level, a higher one, comes when those who fail to understand and appreciate us, are not those whom we help, who after all are not learned people, but when they are our confreres or superiors. They should know what apostolate is about and, instead of supporting us, they criticize us for being late at the community moments, for spending money, for doing too much; sometimes they even say that we work for pride, etc. I am speaking of a situation in which I am in the right and really I am criticized wrongly. The Lord may be teaching us: are you working in my way or in your way?

4- Final and highest level of purification is there when I feel that God himself does not appreciate us, does not listen to our requests which are not made for ourselves but for the sake of those we are working for. Our prayer becomes cold, we feel that God is distant, in spite of the fact that we do everything for him. Do you remember Martha being scolded by Jesus after all the work done for preparing him the supper and the preference given to the lazy Mary? It is the moment of the total surrender. Martha seems to have learned well and she shows it at the moment of the death of Lazarus, in the answer of faith she gives to Jesus. It is also the final cry of Jesus on the Cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” followed by: “Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit”.

God does not want us to work for him, not even to do his work, but to allow Him to do his work in us. "*It isn't any more me who lives but Christ who lives in me". "It is in your weakness that I can show my strength"*.

Let us remember:

- Suffering is never the final stage but a preparation for a higher joy, which often requires us to be purified. It is never a closed room with no escape but a door to be opened to enter the glory.
- In the sufferance we are never alone; Jesus is accompanying us from the Cross.
- If we desire to join him on the cross, He takes us seriously and fulfils our desire.
- Whatever sufferance we are able to endure and offer to Him is immediately transformed into grace for the whole world.
- Those who have less sufferance are not necessarily the holiest people. It could be that the Lord knows how weak they are, they are not ready yet and they would soon collapse.
- The joy does not always come from the end of a problem but is an interior joy, a gift of the Spirit that comes from understanding the value of those moments.

For personal work:

- In which area am I afraid to suffer? (Physical, being rejected, being judged, etc.)
- How do I react when I face a problem?
- How do I react when I am corrected, misunderstood, etc.
- While looking at Jesus on the Cross did I ever have the desire of being more united to Him?

Holy Mass: The thorn in the flesh and the courage to pick up the cross. (2Cor 12,1-10; Mk 8,34-38)

We have some passages in the second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians which are somehow intriguing. They seem not to fit well in the place where they are, neither for the argument nor for the style, so much so that some biblist think that they do not belong to this letter but to a third letter to the Corinthians that got lost, and, in order not to lose these passages so important, they were somehow fit in this letter.

In those passages St. Paul open his heart to the reader and express with all sincerity his pain caused by allegations moved by some enemies of his challenging his authority as apostles and so the right of his teaching. The first reading we heard today report one of those fragments.

The final purpose of our life

After 6 days of talks on our life, on the different aspects of religious life, vows, prayer, community life, apostolate etc. what else could be added?
I hope during these days I didn't scare you nor I bored you or discouraged you from being good servants.
I just ask myself, and invite each one of you to ask himself: tomorrow, when I go out of here what do I go to do? Will I simply continue doing things like before? During this retreat did something happen in me, at the level of the emotions, did I feel, at least in some occasion, the desire to do something in a different way, with a different purpose?
I hope you understood that in my analysis I never doubted on the quality of your works, nor put a question on the fact that you work hard to serve the poor. My aim was to help you to see things from a different point of view, a different perspective, the one of God, the one of Don Orione. It is a bit as to say that we are artists carving a beautiful statue. If we work only sitting in front of it we will be able to take care of all the details we see and make sure that from that position everything looks beautiful and perfect. But remaining just in front of the statue does not allow us to see well the details of the sides of the statue and even less those of the back of it. To handle those details we need to move from our position and turn around our work, only then we could refine all the parts and say that now our work is a masterpiece.
Usually, we start an activity with the purpose of being of use to others. This is a very good starting point, but we cannot stop there, we must progress in our intentions to allow our work to

pass from merely social or philanthropic to a spiritual/apostolic activity. According to Saint Theresa of Avila that progress only comes from embracing the Cross. We must work on ourselves and our intentions to gain spiritual freedom in whatever we do so that it will not just be our work for God and the poor, but it may become God's work for the poor (and also for us). This needs a purification of our mind of which I spoke just this morning. Any progress in our spiritual life, as well as in the apostolic one requires from our side the will of embracing the cross of Jesus. Don Orione understood that well from the beginning when he exclaimed that our little congregation was born on a Good Friday and will grow only if it remains at the feet of the cross. Are we afraid of the cross? Trying to be concrete in what I am saying: are we willing to accept sacrifices, hard work, to give up comfort, free time, hobbies, when required, to walk on the path of Calvary behind Jesus?

The first exercise to do is to learn how to focus on priorities. The first thing to be analysed in any activity is not just the content of what we do and not even the purpose of the work, but our mindset. The old philosopher Socrates use to have as a motto for his life: "*Know yourself*". It is not something granted, especially for us who want to be servants of God, the inner freedom of working in a way according to the mind of God and He is the one who makes the choices.

There is a lot of difference between a Business-mind perspective, administrative perspective, emotional perspective, Cross perspective. In a business-mind perspective, the priorities are set according to the final gain, the structure is more important than the people involved in it. In the administrative perspective, the priorities are set by the criteria of efficiency, order, and so the rules and regulations are more important than the people involved in it. In the emotional perspective, the priorities are set

by the emotional gain I get: admiration, friendship, honour, sense of fulfilment, happiness, comfort, and those are more important than the people and their welfare. In the Cross perspective, the priorities are set by the vision Jesus had from the cross of the people involved in my work, which is their holistic salvation. When I speak of holistic salvation I mean not only the physical welfare but also his emotional, spiritual, moral welfare. The important aim is that the person who comes to my door receives not only the cure or the education or the material help, but also that he feels accepted, understood, appreciated, he feels that God is loving him.

Pope Francis, in the message he sent this year for the XXVIII world day of the sick 2020, he said: "*Why does Jesus have these feelings? Because he himself became frail, endured human suffering and received comfort from his Father. Indeed, only those who personally experience suffering are then able to comfort others*". Sufferance can be of many types but all of them can become like a gymnasium a place where to train and learn. Often it happens that in a province there is a challenging parish and a comfortable one, which do you choose? A poor school or a rich one, one with big numbers and big honour and another small and badly organized, which one you choose? Fear of toil, fear of failure, fear of being judged: how many times we leave out initiatives, possible assignments or jobs, just out of fear! It is a stumbling block against the need of giving oneself to others, entrusting oneself to Providence. Often all this is not due to a real lack of faith, but rather the result of unresolved inner problems, wounds not totally healed, negative experiences not reworked in the light of Christ's cross. Our real question should be: which one needs more help? Which one Jesus would prefer to go to? But of course, to accept such a challenge means to face poverty, lack of resources, less free time for my hobbies, leave behind the friends

I have here to go to a place where I know nobody. Probably that area is unsafe, more polluted, more danger prone, etc. This is the perspective of the Cross.
To have the perspective of the Cross requires that we have the courage to say: "Father into our hands I commend my Spirit". Do we believe that our life is in the hands of God?
Let us think for a moment at the experience of the twelve apostles. As we said in the last few days, several times Jesus taught them about being humble, serving, etc. and every time they showed with their behaviour that they didn't understand the lesson of Jesus. Now they have arrived at Jerusalem, they have been welcomed by the children with songs at Palm Sunday. The illusion of power and glory is still very much present in their hearts. But suddenly Jesus is arrested and condemned to death. Maybe, like it always happens in the movies with the heroes, he would do a big miracle at that moment by escaping from the arrest or while climbing Calvary or getting down from the Cross, even the soldiers were asking Him to do so, but nothing like that happened. Jesus dies and is put in a tomb. This is the moment in which their love for Him and their faith in Him is tested. In spite of the original fear which made them run from the garden of Gethsemane, they remain united, lost in their mind but united in their spirit waiting for development. Their real conversion, the one making them ready for the big task of going to the world as apostles, has to come through the experience of losing Jesus, the experience of defeat, the fear of being arrested and be put to death like Him. Until they were in the shadow of the miracle maker, of the successful preacher, they felt happy and enthusiastic but they were not yet real apostles.
We are experts in what we do, our works are really good ones, top in their category for the whole state, but here is where the danger of drifting to the business perspective is.

Did you ever experience a strong set-back in your life, a failure, a loss? How did you react to that situation? How much did it affect your life, your vocation? What did you learn from it? Could you see God at work at that moment?
St. Paul tells us: (Rm 8,31-39): *"So, what are we going to say about that? If God is for us, who will be against us? He who did not spare his Son, but gave him for all of us, how will he not give us everything together with him? Who will accuse God's chosen ones? God justifies. Who will condemn him? Christ Jesus, who has died, indeed, who has risen, stands to the right of God and intercedes for us? So, who will separate us from the love of Christ? Perhaps tribulation, anguish, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, the sword? Just as it is written: "Because of you we are put to death all day, we are treated like sheep for the slaughter."*
But in all these things we are more than winners by virtue of the one who loved us. In fact, I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor what exists, nor what is still to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature can ever separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus, our Lord".

Here we have also some nice sentence by Pope Francis (Gaudete et exultate, 129-130): *"At the same time, holiness is parrhesia: it is audacity, it is evangelizing momentum that leaves a mark in this world. For this to be possible, Jesus himself comes to meet us and repeats to us with serenity and firmness: "Do not be afraid" (Mc 6.50). "I am with you every day, until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20). These words allow us to walk and serve with that courageous attitude that the Holy Spirit aroused in the Apostles, prompting them to proclaim Jesus Christ. Boldness, enthusiasm, speaking with freedom, apostolic fervour, all this is included in the word parrhesia, a word by which the Bible also expresses the*

freedom of an existence that is open, because it is available to God and to brothers and sisters (cf. Acts 4.29; 9.28; 28.31; 2 Cor 3,12; Eph 3.12; Heb 3.6; 10.19)".

Then he adds: *"Blessed Paul VI mentioned among the obstacles of evangelization precisely the lack of parrhesia: "the lack of fervour, all the more serious because it is born from within". How often do we feel pulled to stop on the comfortable shore! But the Lord calls us to sail offshore and to throw the nets into deeper waters (cf. Lk 5.4). He invites us to spend our lives at his service. Clinging to Him we have the courage to put all our charisms at the service of the other. We could feel driven by his love (cf. 2 Cor 5,14) and say with St Paul, "Woe to me if I do not announce the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9.16)".*
Allow me to narrate two episodes from the life of Don Orione. We know how courageous and strong he has been all through his life. But not all was so easy and nice as it looks from the outside. The first few years of the congregation were signed by a fast growth but also by the alternating support from Bishop Bandi of Tortona, often moody and worried. He one day would encourage him to do and the following day would try to stop him. Truly the Congregation was frail in its structure for the lack of people and of funds. Adding to the many worries, in August 1908 he lost Don Gaspare Goggi, in whom he had put so much hope, and, a month later, he lost also his mother. How did Don Orione react to the losses? The Providence sent him a new challenge to which he answered with his usual generosity. In December there was a big earthquake which devastated the cities of Reggio Calabria and Messina. Don Orione left the shaky congregation in the hands of Don Sterpi and went to the rescue of the needy. He remained there for about two years.
A second trial struck him some years later. While in Messina during the earthquake time, Don Orione was falsely accused of

frequenting prostitutes and having contracted syphilides from them. Though the accusation was soon proved false, it was later on spread as a rumour against him by one of the priests of the Diocese jealous for the fame Don Orione was acquiring for his work and afraid that he was becoming too strong in the Diocese. How did Don Orione react? At first, he tried to pretend that nothing was happening, but then, when the matter was spinning out of control he decided to catch the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress in Buenos Aires and pretending to go to visit his houses there he left to America Latina.

Let us listen to three small passages from letters of Don Orione.

The first one was to a friend, the senator Boggiano Pico-

"*Don Sterpi wrote to me what you are doing to help the sons of Divine Providence, which, I must confess, moves me deeply, and is for me one of the greatest comforts in this exile of mine, half wanted and more than half forced".*

Before leaving Tortona he had gone to visit the Bishop, Mons. Grassi, who was quite sick, but since he could not see him in the house he wrote to him this letter, of which he gave a copy also to Don Sterpi.

"Your excellency, do not fear that I would take too much power in Tortona: You know, my dear Father, that we have never interfered in the administration of the Diocese, neither directly nor indirectly; only when your Excellency would talk to me about some of his pains, I would try to give some comfort. Your Excellency, I humbly plead you in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Virgin, do not die in this situation. You know that somebody has tried to through mud at me, and what a mud! It has been four years now that I have been waiting for a word from my Bishop to defend me: The calumny has now spread so much in the Diocese and even outside of it, that even my students came to know it! Priests and laypeople too spoke about it. I have always remained silent, I have always suffered for

it and prayed, but I am not made of stone. It is a matter of good name and of something that a priest should consider dearest: his honour. I have asked help from the Church and from my Bishop … I never asked for trials: I do not want evil for anybody, but the good of all: I forgive all, I would give my life for everyone. In prayer, in silence and in hope I have waited patiently, and with the full trust of a son, for a word from my bishop and Father, that would say that all is false; From my Church which is in Tortona, which I have always loved and served as one would love his mother, no word has come. My good Father, please do not allow yourself to die in this way.

Sadly the Bishop never had the chance to read the letter because he died before receiving it. We do not know if anyone else opened it, we just know of it from the copy Don Sterpi had received from Don Orione himself.

After two years working in Argentina, Don Orione received from Don Sterpi the information that Rome had decided to send an Apostolic Visitor to investigate the state of the Congregation and its functioning. Don Orione replied to Don Sterpi:

"This visitor is, and so we all must believe is, an extraordinary grace from God, even though it may have been provoked by accusations made against me personally by people displeasing our Little Work and hostile to me. They just waited for me to be far away. I have known about this storm for a long time, and when two years ago I left Italy, I threw myself into the sea, a bit like Jonah, and I have always hoped that my absence would have helped for the storm to calm, and would have spared to the poor boat of the congregation.

Here I have looked for work to do, so to be able to delay a bit my return, and so excuse in the eyes of people and also in your eyes my being far away, and not to make you suffer, I hid from you my painful situation, especially the personal one.

Most of all I hoped that the accusers, not seeing me, would quiet down. It seems that did not happen so. Be patient, my children, we take all that comes from the holy hand of God, and go forward in the Lord!
Let us not be dejected, but let us love more and more the Lord and the holy Church.
Let us bless the Lord at every time and for everything that the Lord will decide or will hallow: surely everything will be for our own good".
As you may understand the generosity Don Orione applied in both situations, made so that the congregation in the first case, spread well in Reggio Calabria and Messina, and in the second, in Argentina with the opening of 15 new houses.
During the three years in Argentina, he worked harder than never before. He was concentrating on charity while leaving all the other worries in the hands of the Lord. Let us hear what he wrote to the Apostolic visitor, Abate Caronti, speaking about his work in Saenz Peña
"If I knew I was going to be here, I would ask to go to Chaco to die, that is, to consume myself and live as a true Missionary, entrusted to the Lord.
Saenz Peña is a city of about 20 thousand inhabitants with another 10 thousand scattered in the colonies at huge distances, it takes hours and hours of driving. There are the Protestants of various sects who work and have evangelical halls, churches, libraries etc. There is the synagogue because there are many Jews, - the Catholic church works from a room, and the altar consists of three planks nailed on two easels, - then there is a sleeping room. [...].
I have a desire: to love the Lord and to love the Holy Church, the souls, the poor, the poor children, the abandoned, the poor classes, the workers, the communists: I would like to die for these brothers of mine, and I would like to be forgotten by all. To live and to die

forgotten by all, under the feet of all, and only love Jesus, the Holy Church and all, and lose myself in the Lord: - I, unworthy as I am, who have sinned so much, that I have been so bad with the Lord and with Our Lady, and I have not appreciated the gifts of the Lord! Help me, dear Father Visitor, help me!"

For personal work

- How did I feel during this retreat?
- What was the reflection that inspired me most?
- Was there any reflection that disturbed me?
- What will change in my life now that I go home?

Last Mass We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Cor 4:7-18)

Once I read an article about the final greetings of the Mass: "The Mass is ended, go in peace", which wants to be the translation of "*ite missa est*". The author was explaining that in old days, the priest used to save some of the consecrated bread and after the Mass entrust it to people to bring it to those who could not attend the Mass because they are sick. The word "Missa" comes from the root of "*mittere*", to send, like a mission. So the priest would say: "Now that the celebration is over, go because the mission starts". So today I would like to say: Only the first part of the retreat is over, now you go and do the second part, the practical one. Go with the mission of translating what you understood, into daily life.

We have heard St. Paul saying that we have a treasure in earthen vessels. Indeed our life and our vocation are such a treasure. Indeed these five days have provided you with a treasure of reflections, inspirations, resolutions, the desire of holiness. But this treasure is in the easy to break pots of our human nature, our personality, our weaknesses, and shortcomings. These vessels are threatened by the routine of our life, by the demands of the apostolate, by the opposition of the society.

I hope I have not given the impression that what you have done until now was wrong. I know very well that you are doing a wonderful job, often in places where many would be afraid of adventure. What I wanted to do during these days, was to give some instruments to make your life more fruitful, of the fruits coming from the grace of God. The Lord has chosen you for a

purpose and this purpose has to be the engine of your life. The Lord wants to renew this society and make it more and more his, and to do so he has chosen you, but a real renewal has to start from within. We will be able to change the others if we have the courage to change ourselves. Never create division or opposition between prayer and apostolate, spiritual and apostolic life. If we feel that on some occasions there is incompatibility among the two, then it means that we are focusing in the wrong direction, that our approach to the situation needs to be changed.

Remember always that we are at the service of the plan of God, not of ourselves, He is the main actor, we the followers and as He said: *"No disciple is greater than his master"* (Jn 13:16).

Do not be afraid of the difficulties, especially the spiritual ones and remember the words of the Gospel: If you want to be a follower of mine, pick up your cross and follow me.

The last topic was a sad one: sufferance. Now I want to change it into a joyful one: The last who wins is always Jesus Christ and he wins through his love. We are called to be witnesses in a world full of sufferance and destructions, but what we witness through our apostolate is the risen Lord. We live in a world that has lost the sense of hope and through our vows, we have to remind people of the eternal life to which all of us are destined. We live in a world hardened by greed, power, lust, and we are called to be stumbling blocks to make the wrongdoers realize their mistakes. We live in a world that looks for pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction; we are called to be the witnesses of the deep, inner, everlasting joy.

So do not be afraid to go into the desert but always come back to the marketplace stronger and better. Do not be afraid to climb the mountain of Calvary but then come down to the city and proclaim the resurrection. Do not be afraid to love people

but give them the Love of the Lord, not just yours, and be ready to surrender them to the Lord to set them free.

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